

ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Library respects the copyright and intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection. The Library holds the rights and permissions to put this material online. If you hold an active copyright to this work and would like to have your materials removed from the web please contact the USHMM Library by phone at 202-479-9717, or by email at digital_library@ushmm.org.

LOST GENERATIONS

LOST

GENERATIONS

A MEMOIR

Renata Laxova

DS

135

C97

L39

2000

LOST GENERATIONS

DEDICATED TO

ALEXANDER

ON THE OCCASION

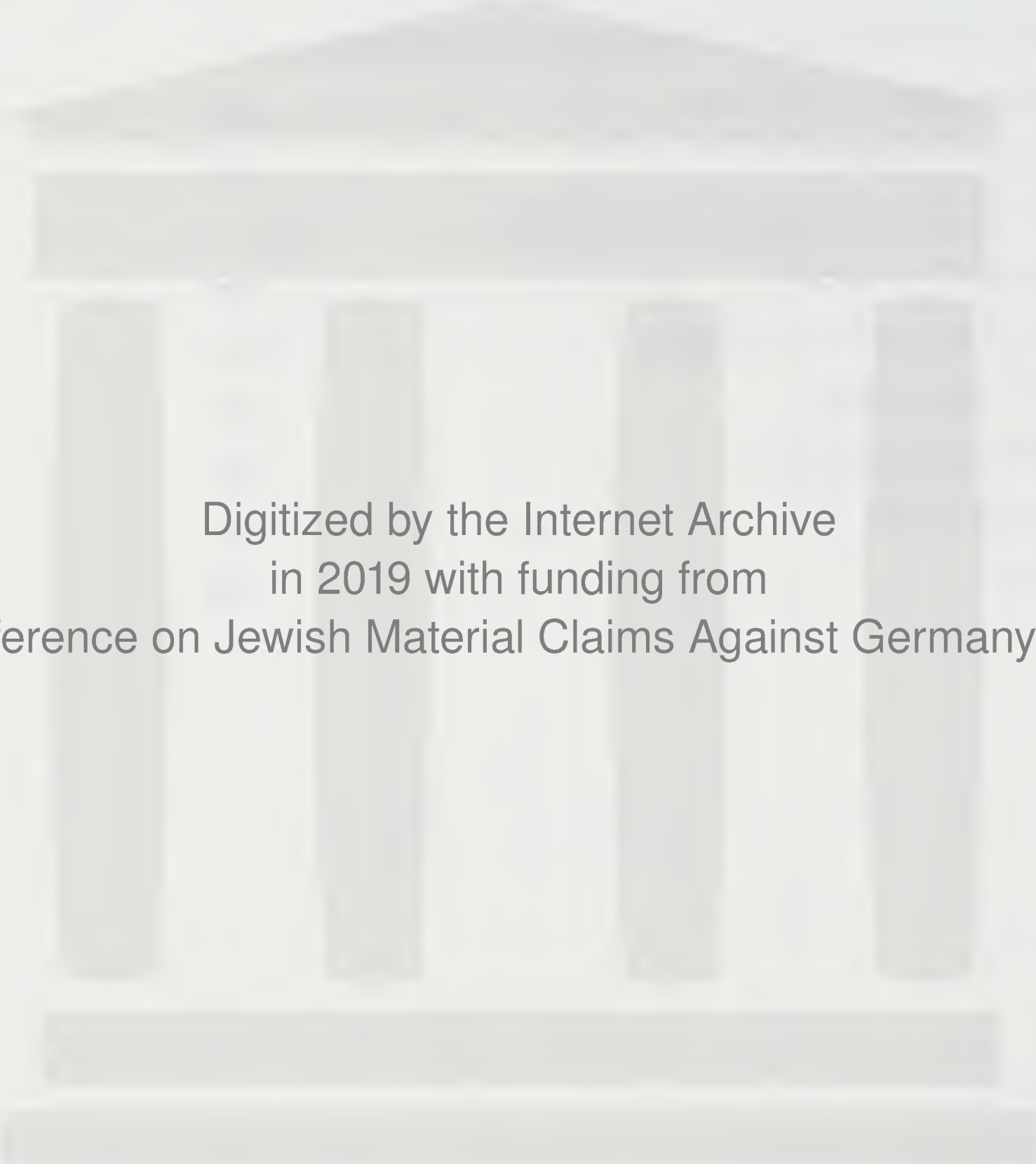
OF HIS

EIGHTH BIRTHDAY

JULY 9th 2000

LOST GENERATIONS

LETTER TO ALEXANDER	1
THE FIRST REPUBLIC.....	5
THE PROTECTORATE OF BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA.....	57
BEGINNINGS IN ENGLAND.....	92
WHAT IS RENATE ?.....	114
SCHWESTER SUSANNA SCHLESINGER.....	132
MIKULÁŠ POTOČNÝ.....	152
THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH	156
RENAME DANIELS.....	167
RENATA POLGAROVÁ	197
BIG BROTHER	209
TIBOR.....	256



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Inc.

<https://archive.org/details/lostgenerationsm01laxo>

My Dear Alexander,

When you were born, on July 9th 1992, I received a gift from a friend. It was a book, called 'The Grandparents' Book'. As I opened it however, I realized that it wasn't a book to be read, it was a book to be written. On each of the some twenty five pages, there were two questions, one at the top and one in the middle, with empty spaces between them. The questions were formulated as if written by a child talking to a grandparent. So for example, the first questions were "Where were you when I was born?" "Whom did you tell or call when I was born?" "Where were *you* born, what were the names of your parents? Where did you go to school, did you have a best friend, what was your best friend's name? What were your hobbies?" There was even a question about favorite television programs and pop stars. There was no television yet when I was a little girl of course, I didn't see my first television set until I was fifteen years old and, as you can imagine, it was nothing like the ones we have today.

As I read the questions in the book, I tried to answer them, writing by hand within the spaces provided. But as the answers about the times of my childhood and adolescence became more complicated, I realized that the events leading up to World War Two in Central Europe, the six years of the war itself and its devastating aftermath could not be fitted into the spaces provided by the Grandparents' Book, each space only about three inches long. I also realized that, although the printed questions in the book were addressed to me, I could not separate my childhood, my life, from that of my family - your family, dear Alexander, and, as you will see, there was no way that the adventures of your

Great Grandma Nelly or your Great Grandpa Miki (my Mom and Dad) could be compressed into a few hand written lines on half a page.

So although the half filled Grandparents' Book still exists, I abandoned its format and while you were still a newborn baby, I began to write a letter to you.

Eventually, it turned into the longest letter that I had ever written, perhaps the longest letter ever written in the whole wide world, particularly to a newborn baby. It was sixty pages long and I gave it to you for your first birthday.

First I wanted to welcome you into the world and to tell you how very, very proud and happy we all were to have you in our family. Your Great Grandpa Miki was living in Brno at that time and you met him there, when you were just ten weeks old. Just imagine, you flew across the Atlantic Ocean at age ten weeks, and you slept on the plane in a cradle that was suspended above the seats. You don't remember that visit of course, but there is a picture of your Great Grandpa proudly pushing your stroller in Brno. He was 94 years old at that time. There is another picture, Great Grandpa Miki's very favorite, of you, very soon after you were born, in which your Mom is holding you and you are looking into her eyes, as if you were saying, "Hi, Mom, here I am, let me look at you and get to know your face!" Ask your Mom to show you that picture sometime.

Then there was your Grandpa Tibor who was so proud and wanted so very very much for you to be part of the life that he had missed because of that horrible World War Two. He, too, is no longer here with us, but perhaps you remember visiting him in Darlington and milking a cow with him and not liking the milk

because it was warm. Or do you remember riding on his big tractor mower? I miss him a lot and wish he were here to see you.

Then there's Danny. I don't have to tell you anything about her or remind you of her because she's the one who knows how to have fun, how to play and how to choose presents and surprises. She's also the one who lives in the middle of all the cacti (!!) and wishes that she, Linda , Madison and Dasha all lived nearer to you.

And now back to the sixty page letter. I looked at it again when I was visiting Brno in November of last year. I realized that you were already seven years old, going on eight and there was so much more I could and wanted to tell you. So I decided to abandon the letter also and to try put everything into a book. And so what you have before you, is no longer just a 'Grandparents' Book' (any grandparents) it is our book, all about our and therefore YOUR family, my Alexander. I wanted you to know not only who WE are, who the family is and was into which you were born, eight years ago today. You are a big and important part of that family. I wanted you also to know who YOU are, and some day, when you are ready and interested, perhaps you and I and your Mom and Danny and whoever else wants to (Pepinka, Madison, Dasha?* - just kidding) can explore some of that history together.

For example, I'd like you, through the book, to get to know your Great Grandma Nelly (my Mom) who would have been the proudest of all to have known you. She would have made sure that everyone around, even strangers, admired you and said nice things about you! She loved to 'show off' with your Mom and

Danny. But apart from that, she was a truly remarkable and heroic woman. One day, when you read about her in this book, I think you'll agree that some of her adventures were almost as interesting and hair raising as Harry Potter's!

I have dedicated the book to you, for your eighth birthday, not only because I love you but because it was around my own eighth birthday, sixty one years ago, when, like you, I had finished second grade and was ready to enter third, that all the events that are described in this book, began to happen.

With love

Your Grandma Renata.

July 9th 2000, Madison, Wisconsin.

* the family dogs.

My childhood lasted exactly eight years and fifteen days and although its memories have remained with me throughout my life, never before have they consumed my thoughts and senses as vividly as during my recent visit to Brno in November 1999. They came crowding to the surface in the sharp, cold air, mingled with the smells of late autumn evenings and the sounds of the tramcars awakening me in the early morning. With them came the realization that I had attained the time in my life when I was finally ready to tell the story - all of it - the good and the bad.

THE FIRST REPUBLIC

My mother was a monarchist, or so, with tongue in cheek, she always maintained. She was born during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and she loved the glamour and pageantry of the court of Kaiser Franz Josef and his beautiful Queen Elisabeth. My mother's romantic vision of Vienna consisted of grand balls, Strauss waltzes, lovely gowns and of course The Opera. Her father, my grandfather Alois Jokl, danced beautifully and whenever he accompanied her as chaperon to dancing lessons, all the teenage girls clamored to be allowed to dance with him. He also had perfect pitch and although he did not play a musical instrument, he apparently whistled exquisitely and was frequently invited by the band or orchestra to come onstage and whistle to their accompaniment. It was from him that my mother Nelly acquired her love of opera, but unfortunately, her ability to play the piano and sing a little, frequently led to discord between them. Alois was not a patient man and he expected Nelly to be able to sight read and

sing every new opera or operetta as soon as he brought the music and placed it before her on the piano. She often told me how displeased and disappointed he was when her performance was not immediately to his satisfaction. They loved one another deeply and spent many vacations together, taking “the waters” at some of the well known central European spas, like Karlsbad (frequented in their day by Beethoven and Goethe) Marienbad and Luhačovice. All three spas were located in what in 1918, after World War I and the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, became Czechoslovakia, a democratic, highly industrialized and culturally developed republic, under its first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

Nelly was a charming, outgoing young woman, an only child, with shiny black hair and vivid light blue eyes. She was fifteen on September 25th 1918 and Czechoslovak independence was declared on October 28th of that year. Her mother Selma née Hayek, was still with her husband and daughter at that time. When Nelly was three, they had moved from her (and Selma's) birth place, Gaya (its German name) or Kyjov in Czech, a small town in southern Moravia , where Jews had been allowed to settle for centuries, to Brno, the capital of Moravia and, after Prague, the biggest city in the country. It is located some sixty miles north of Vienna and evening or weekend excursions by train to the Vienna State Opera or to consult medical specialists during the week, were no rarity for those who could afford them. Selma, born in 1874, was the first of three children; her sister, Hermine, was born exactly one year to the day after Selma and they had a younger brother, Gustav (Gustl) . We know little about Selma, Hermine and Gustl's parents apart from the fact that they too hailed from Kyjov, and both died within months of one another around 1908. Their mother,

whose maiden name was Friedlander, apparently died in the bathtub, of a heart attack. Hermine with her husband, Karl Mandl, who owned a leather goods store, and their four children, Hans, Kurt, Ilse and Benjamin (Beno) also lived in Kyjov. She and her elder sister, my grandmother Selma, were close and as a result, the five children, particularly Nelly and her two years younger cousin Ilse, grew up almost as siblings. The Mandl family also moved to Brno, the big city, when Ilse, born in 1905, was about five years old. They did everything together, Selma spent much time at her sister's house, they moved in the same circles and had the same family friends. In Kyjov, grandfather Alois had represented a large wholesale wine business which was associated with frequent travel and absences from home. He had an elder sister Rosa, who lived in Berlin and, according to family lore, upon learning of her brother's engagement to the gentle, quiet, refined Selma, from a "good Jewish home", Rosa appeared unannounced in Kyjov for a whirlwind visit, to warn Selma's parents about Alois's reputation: he was said to have women friends in every city and to be capable of dancing and whistling his way into the heart of each of them. Unfortunately, Selma was in love and convinced that it would be she and their future children who would be instrumental in changing Alois's lighthearted way of life. She was wrong.

Sometime after the move to Brno, in 1906, Alois and Selma became the directors of a home for elderly Jews, supported by the Rosenthal Foundation, established by the Rosenthal family who owned the famous porcelain factories in Austria. The Jokls had a spacious apartment within the building of the home, on the third floor. Contact with the Mandl family continued and it appears that Nelly and her four cousins had a happy, secure childhood, surrounded by family

traditions, friends, good schools and music. I know little about the Jokl and Mandl families' involvement in World War One.

Although she was raised to speak both Czech and German, Nelly attended German schools. Brno with a total population of some 300,000, was a cultural center, with a large, mostly integrated middle-class Jewish population of about 60,000. It was the city of Johann Gregor Mendel, Jan Purkyně, Leoš Janáček. And although during the First Republic, as Czechoslovakia became known, Jews throughout the country were unquestionably and without exception loyal to President Masaryk, the geographic and previous political proximity of Moravia to Vienna and Austria, probably resulted in greater identification with the German language. This was not the only reason however. It was Joseph II's Toleranzpatent of 1787, that had given Jews freedom to work in the professions, attend universities, live in cities. But German was the official legal language, and, by law, Jews had had to accept German surnames which frequently described their station, craft or place of origin. Examples of such names included Schneider (taylor) Stein (stone) Lustig (merry) others. In spite of these laws, the Jewish population of Prague and Bohemia, while also bilingual, had identified somewhat more strongly with Czech culture and language. Masaryk was a professor of philosophy by profession and a humanist by persuasion. During a study trip to the United States, he had met his future wife Charlotte Garrigue, whose name he later added to his own. He also became acquainted with President Woodrow Wilson whose friendship and support subsequently greatly enhanced the birth of the Czechoslovak republic in 1918. Masaryk had particularly endeared himself to the Jewish population by, among other issues, his public defense of Leopold Hilsner, an innocent Jewish citizen who had been

wrongly accused of murdering a Christian child and using the blood for a religious ritual. This unthinkable myth, about the need for human blood for certain religious Jewish customs, persists to this day in the distorted minds of some anti-Semitic individuals.

On a more personal level, one of the stories that Nelly shared with me was that of her first grade teacher, a battle-ax of a woman who later was one of the first in Brno, to wear an armband with a swastika. She apparently delighted in holding the children responsible for schoolwork that had been missed during their absence for e.g. Yom Kippur, the most significant Jewish holiday of the year and distributing bad marks to each of them. The same teacher, upon asking Nelly her name, had confused the little girl by insisting that her name could not be Nelly, since that was only a nickname; her name had to be Genendl (the name of a rather "simple" peasant girl in German children's literature.) No amount of tears or parental intervention, prevented this frightening individual from addressing my mother as "Nelly -Genendl Jokl" throughout the whole of her first year in school. I assume this had quite an impact and loomed large in my mother's memories. At least it was something she chose to share with me, in contrast to many other, more traumatic experiences from her youth and adolescence, which she did not.

It was in connection with the Rosenthal Foundation home that my grandfather Alois became acquainted with Marie Fischer alias Mitzi, as we all came to know and think about her. She was the only maternal grandmother in my life. Selma had died before I was born, under tragic and rather mysterious circumstances. It is unclear whether and where Alois had met Mitzi, before he offered her the job

of director / housekeeper at the Rosenthal home. Be that as it may, he (predictably) fell in love with her and, somewhat less predictably, suggested that she move into the house as part of her work. A *ménage à trois* would apparently have been acceptable to the incorrigible Alois, since, as he continuously maintained, he never stopped loving Selma, but could not help loving Mitzi too. Such an arrangement was understandably unfathomable to Selma and, although the details are unclear to me, it is my impression that it was under her own impetus that she finally moved out.

That was the occasion when my mother's unhappiness must have started. Selma lived in a home for 'gentlewomen' who were either single, alone or otherwise unattached. In any event, it was an expensive way of living and Selma did not support herself. Nelly wanted to live with her mother, even though she deeply loved her father also. Alois however apparently agreed to pay Selma's considerable living expenses only on condition that Nelly remain with him in their home. The state of the teenager's confusion, conflicting thoughts and desperation is difficult to imagine, particularly when her closest potential source of emotional support, namely the Mandl family, her aunt, uncle and four cousins, interrupted all contact with her, blaming her for the decision to remain with her father. So Nelly's late adolescence and early adulthood must have been tainted with deep unhappiness and conflict. She never spoke about these issues with me, although she loved to reminisce about her high school years. She would describe her school-girl crushes on teachers (she attended a "lyceum" for girls) enjoyed literature, music, theatre, acting and spent a great deal of time at the home of her best friend Uli (Ursula) Hirsch, the daughter of an intellectual artistic couple, with Uli and her younger sister Francie. I think it was there that she found

vivacious and interested in the boys who were invited to the house for dancing lessons, Uli was more serious and introverted. She, too, was a talented artist, but because she was frequently sick, she spent many weeks in Swiss and Italian sanatoria. It was in one of these, where, at the beginning of World War II, she committed suicide. Francie also did not survive the war. In my home I have a still-life, painted by Uli and Francie's father and from my early childhood, I have memories of visits with my mother to a very old lady who lived in a large elegant mansion. My mother called her Omi Hirsch, and I always had to be on my best behavior and wear white gloves. She was the girls' paternal grandmother and she and my mother were close. I don't know what happened to her, whether she died "in bed", as my mother always described those fortunate enough to have had a natural death, or whether she lived long enough to be murdered by the Nazis.

Initially, Nelly deeply resented Mitzi's presence in the home and even mentioned these feelings to me in our later conversations, although she had deliberately created the impression that her mother had died before Mitzi became part of her life. This of course was untrue. Mitzi and Alois had lived together for some years, before Selma, having refused to grant Alois a divorce, died, unexpectedly and suddenly after a gall-bladder operation. She had apparently recovered but suffered a fatal embolus. My mother came to visit her in the hospital one day and found her bed empty. She recalled a cold and unsympathetic nurse informing her that her mother had just died shortly before her arrival. This much I knew. What I did not know was that this happened in 1927, at least five years after Mitzi had become the mistress of Alois and Nelly's household. I often think and wonder what Nelly's life must have been like during those years, visiting her mother,

become the mistress of Alois and Nelly's household. I often think and wonder what Nelly's life must have been like during those years, visiting her mother, continuously observing and envying friends and classmates from peaceful, conventional family homes. I have never been able to imagine how she must have felt and I regret deeply that she and I never had the opportunity to discuss those years together. Perhaps they were the reason that later in life, she cried so easily; perhaps, obversely, they provided strength and the inner resources to make some of the vital decisions that awaited her during the Holocaust years.

In spite of her inauspicious beginnings with our family, Mitzi was a remarkable woman and it is unclear whether her role in the disruption of my grandparents' marriage was active or passive. Once, as she expressed the wish that I had had a little boy, she told me sadly, that she had been married previously, early in life, to an alcoholic in Vienna. After the death of her little boy (the only child she ever had) she left her husband and returned to Brno. She came from a large, poor Catholic family and when she converted to Judaism for my grandfather's sake, her family renounced and abandoned her as a traitor. (Later, when she was helping Jews during the occupation, one of her brothers reported her to the Nazis). Conversion to Judaism was not just a formality for Mitzi. Sabbath and High Holiday services were always held directly on the premises of the Rosenthal Foundation, to enable the old people to attend. Mitzi was capable not only of following and reading the Hebrew text, but she had memorized many of the passages and could conduct the service herself if needed. This of course was unheard of. Women were segregated and not included in the service even in the most liberal of synagogues, until perhaps the mid 1980's . They are still not accepted by many conservative groups around the world.

Furthermore, she was a devoted and exemplary caretaker for Alois , her second of what eventually would be four husbands, whom she loved devotedly. He developed angina pectoris in his sixties and for the last two years of his life he was in chronic congestive heart failure. He was short of breath, had severe swelling of the feet and abdomen and spent most of his days and nights sitting immobile, in an armchair. Mitzi would sit beside him, holding his hand. If he fell asleep, she would slip her arms out of the robe or garment that she happened to be wearing, leave him holding onto the sleeve and run to attend to at least some of the myriad responsibilities associated with running a home for some seventy people. When he awoke, he would call for her and she would resume her vigil by his side. It was she who learned to drain excess fluid from his abdomen, who helped him breathe and changed his dressings. She was a perfect nurse After his death in May of 1932, when I was 9 months old, she continued as director of the home. She was an excellent cook and baker and prided herself in the ability to spend a whole day in the kitchens, directing the staff and participating in meal preparation, in her best silk dress, in high heels, makeup, not a hair out of place, without ever becoming frustrated or soiling her clothes. As a relatively young widow (she was about 41, just twelve years older than my mother, when Alois died) she traveled alone, around Europe when work permitted, visiting spas and opera houses in Austria, Italy, Switzerland, always elegantly dressed, staying in the best hotels.

I remember her as Omama who always prepared my favorite food , who brought wonderful presents and with whom I had a close relationship. My favorite time of year was Passover. We would have Seders at the Rosenthal

Foundation and I had to recite the Ma nishtana, to the admiration of everyone present. Not only would there be a surprise for me when I produced the Afikoman (the hidden matzah) without which the Seder service could not be completed, but our Seder was always preceded by a treasure hunt organized for me by Omama Mitzi inside her apartment. Oh the excitement of finding all those new dolls, games and Easter eggs! I don't remember the ends of Seders, since presumably, I was carried off, sleeping, to one of her huge, soft, sweet smelling beds with their cozy goose feather filled duvets. That is where I woke up next morning, secure, happy and loved. She was practical, consistent and had a great deal of common sense, particularly where communication with me was concerned.

An episode from my early childhood comes to mind. My mother and I were to meet Mitzi in town one afternoon and for some reason I was screaming (I no longer know why). My mother was dragging me by the hand to our meeting place. As soon as she saw me, Mitzi asked with a very puzzled and concerned expression on her face, "Where is Renate? I don't know this little girl ! Who is she and where did you leave my little Renate?" I could not bear the thought that my beloved Omama did not recognize me and more importantly, that she missed me, so I immediately announced, "Here I am, Omama !" and my tears were forgotten. I trusted her implicitly and think of her a great deal. Her house was always immaculate, elegant and full of lovely antiques. It was she who, in my parents' absence on vacation, with characteristic insight and a natural instinct for human nature, hired our loyal Manya, then a young girl from the country, who was to live with us and help my mother with everything from cleaning and cooking to taking care of me. (I should add that additional help was always hired

for the annual spring cleaning and other heavy chores such as carrying coal from the cellar to our third floor apartment and others). I was staying with Mitzi when Manya came for her interview. It was the summer of my first birthday and Manya subsequently maintained that it was love at first sight for both of us. I have no recollection of that first encounter of course, but Manya became a wonderful playmate, and a loyal, heroic friend to the whole family during the Nazi occupation. Although she lived well into her nineties (she was about 29 when she joined our family) Manya always insisted that the seven short years she spent with us, were the happiest in her life.

Mitzi too, was a heroine. Her exceptionally courageous deeds which will be mentioned later, helped many people during the war, including our own family. As I grew up, she became my trusted confidante and friend and much of her advice and wisdom remains with me to this day.

I must assume that my mother's antagonism toward Mitzi relented somewhat over the years, particularly as Alois's heart disease progressed. Both Mitzi and my mother delighted in recounting the story of "The Haircut". Prior to the early twenties, most women had long hair. My mother wore hers down her back, with a "Mozart bow" at the nape of her neck. Mitzi's was kept in a neat roll, also at the neck. When short hair became the fashion (called "Bubykopf", the German equivalent of "small boy's head") my mother maintained that she was the last of her peers to have long hair. In his characteristically autocratic way, Alois threatened that neither she nor Mitzi would be allowed into the house with short hair. Early one afternoon, my mother made the momentous decision, called Mitzi and, together they had their hair cut. They arrived home and unfortunately, Alois

himself was waiting at the door. He took one look and closed the door before they could enter. According to my mother, Mitzi was upset and wanted to go in and beg his forgiveness; Nelly would have none of it. She stole inside, collected nightwear and toothbrushes, left a message with the maid, that they were both safe, but would indeed not be home that night, nor, she added, any other night in the near future. At Nelly's instigation, they both checked into a hotel for the night. Mitzi was unhappy, greatly concerned about Alois's diseased heart. The next morning, they called home, again spoke to the maid, reemphasizing that they were safe, staying in a hotel; but did not divulge which one. Around eleven o'clock that morning, a knock on their hotel room door revealed a sheepish Alois, with two large bouquets of red roses, begging their forgiveness and asking them to come home. He had called every hotel in Brno until he had located where they were registered. There were many other similar episodes from family lore, which I loved to hear, over and over again, particularly because, first, my mother was a talented and animated story teller. Secondly, she never revealed what I now suspect must have been much underlying sadness and bitterness at Mitzi's presence in the home, at a time when her own mother, Selma, must still have been living, alone, elsewhere, within the same city. For me, the stories were funny, told with humor, mostly full of love and illustrative of family life and customs.

Nelly graduated from high school (the Girls'Lyceum) with a good traditional generally humanistic education in languages (German, Czech, French) music, literature, drama; she acted in Schiller's "Maria Stuart", and Heine's Buch der Lieder was her favorite collection of poetry. She insisted on continuing to learn instead of staying at home, embroidering, playing the piano and receiving

more freedom perhaps from her father, Mitzi, and all that they represented. She took a two year course in shorthand, typing and subsequently worked as what would now be termed a paralegal secretary in a law firm. She told me she thought about law school but made no further attempts in that direction, since she was Jewish and the numbers of admissions to Universities were limited for Jews, but, above all of course she was a female and female lawyers were almost unheard of in the early twenties. Those years of young adulthood were filled with memories of theatre, particularly opera. (Puccini had just become popular and she played Musetta's Waltz on the piano to her dying day) but she also loved Verdi, Donizetti and knew a great deal about them all. The twenties were the heyday of Viennese drama with many of the great actors also visiting nearby Brno, they were the time of Kafka and his Milena, the Zweig brothers, Stefan and Arnold, and many other young intellectuals. My mother thrived on the atmosphere. She spent vacations in spas with her father and loved to dance at afternoon teas or balls, frequently also organized by the parents of her good friend Uli Hirsch.

In March of 1925, when she was twenty one, she started a new position as secretary in the legal department of one of the largest department stores not only in Brno, but in Czechoslovakia. It belonged to the family of wealthy Czech Jews whose patriarch at the time was Mr. Heinrich Placek (pronounced Plachek).

On that very same day a new accountant was hired for the firm, a twenty seven year old man from Slovakia, named Nicholas (nicknamed Miki, Miklos in Hungarian) Polgar. Miki had come to Brno via Romania, where he had worked for several years after he had dropped out of law school, having completed four

for several years after he had dropped out of law school, having completed four of the required ten semesters. He had had to give up his studies in favor of his elder brother Gyuri (George) who was in the eighth semester of twelve, of medical school in Prague. Money had run out in the Polgar family, who had six children, three boys, three girls, so it was decided that the oldest, the one nearest to completion at the critical time, would be allowed to continue. With characteristic generosity, Miki readily sacrificed his own career, although he later admitted that he always dreamed of returning to law school under more favorable circumstances. It was not to be.

He was the third of the six children, born on March 11th 1898, after Gyuri, Erzsi (Elizabeth) and followed by Yolanda (Jolly) Hugo and Grete (Gretchen) the youngest. All were born in Kežmarok (Kezmark) a historic little town in central Slovakia immediately under the Tatra mountains, famous for its old wooden church, still a tourist attraction, and its excellent but strict Hungarian High School, The Gymnasium, which all the Polgar children attended. [After I came to the United States and saw for the first time the square in one of our small Wisconsin towns, I was immediately reminded of Kežmarok.] My paternal grandmother, Fanny, née Schlesinger, was a tiny, slim, energetic woman, with white hair in a bun and glasses. She called me "Šmekán" the meaning of which escapes me to this day; I know it was an endearment and it reminds me of something good to eat ("schmecken" in German is "to taste" in English). It seems that Grandmother Polgar was the one who not only ruled the family, but it was she who meted out punishment to all six children, frequently using her hand or even a wicker carpet beater for the purpose. "A spank that fails to reach its goal is wasted energy" was one of her loosely translated, tongue in cheek mottos. She and my

grandfather Benjamin had a general store with several apprentices, most of whom lived and ate with the family. Occasionally, cousins or more distant relatives would stay at the house to attend the famous high school or other institutions. Consequently, Fanny frequently cooked, baked, cleaned and did laundry for some sixteen or more members of the household on a daily basis. They all participated in Shabbat meals on Friday nights and Saturdays, as well as in many of the holiday celebrations, like Passover, Rosh Hashannah and others.

The Polgar family's best friends were the Hartmanns, with twelve children. My father's eyes would glow when he reminisced about their weekly family outings, every Sunday to the "Jerusalemberg" (Jerusalem Hill) a favorite picnic location above Kežmarok. There would always be at least eighteen (six Polgar and twelve Hartmann) children and who knows how many friends, adults and others. Jenö (John) Hartmann was and remained my father's best friend for life. He survived the Holocaust, although at least nine of his siblings and their families did not. The Hartmanns had a large leather goods store on the square in Kežmarok and it is my impression that the current famous luggage line bearing their name belongs to members of the original Kežmarok family.

I never knew my paternal grandfather Benjamin. He died suddenly and unexpectedly, after a stroke, aged 62, in May of 1931, two months before my birth. My parents were summoned urgently to his side, my mother 7 months pregnant. On his deathbed, my grandfather asked Miki to promise that as long as he lived, he would never fail to pray and lay t'fillim twice a day, in the way it is prescribed by Jewish law. For the rest of his life, even within concentration

camps and prisons, my father never failed to keep this promise .If he could not pray overtly, he would do so silently, reciting from memory the daily passages which, in Jewish liturgy, differ throughout the year.

I think my father, more than any of his siblings, inherited his father's gentle kindness, his lack of assertiveness and selfless decent nature. It was my grandfather, who, when sent by my grandmother to collect debts accumulated by their store customers over the past year, always returned home with less money in his pocket than he had had at the outset. Much to my grandmother's frustration, he would explain how so many poor families in Kežmarok had nothing, how he had felt sorry for them and contributed just a little to their meager households. Or, for example, when something went wrong at school, and this happened quite frequently, after all, there were six children, Benjamin would send a gift from the store to the teacher, and instruct the children to "kiss the teacher's hand". This later became a humorous catch phrase in my own family, as an all encompassing solution to any problem. Just "kiss the teacher's hand and all will be well". On a more serious note, it was my grandfather Benjamin's kindness that eventually brought about the ruin of the store and the need for my father not only to interrupt his studies of law, but to find relatively better paying work in Romania. After that time, even after his return to Czechoslovakia, and his eventual marriage to my mother, my father never ceased to support his mother, his sisters and their families.

My paternal family name was not always Polgar. It was originally Pinkas, a traditionally Jewish name. Both my father's paternal uncles, Benjamin's brothers Joseph (Jozsi) and Marcel, were physicians. Benjamin was the youngest. It is

not interested. Be that as it may, it appears that Joseph and Marcel, either embarrassed by their Jewish name or concerned that their patients would prefer physicians whose name was not obviously Jewish, decided legally to exchange Pinkas for Polgar which is the Hungarian word for “citizen”. Benjamin resisted for several years, considering the change disloyal to his ancestors, but prior to his marriage to Fanny, he finally relented, preferring to share his name with his two brothers to whom he felt and remained close. Hence, in good patrician spirit, our family name became “citizen”, but thanks to the decimation of most of my relatives, it is unlikely to endure for generations to come.

My father was seventeen when in 1915, he was enlisted into the Kaiser’s army to defend the Fatherland during World War I. His graduation from the Gymnasium was hastened forward by some months and having successfully completed his examinations, or Baccalaureat as it is sometimes called, he joined his elder brother Gyuri who was about 21, in the Medical Corps of the Austro-Hungarian Army. In later years, he loved to describe jokingly, how at the beginning of the war, he joined the army on one side and at the end, after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the establishment of several new, smaller states, Czechoslovakia among them, he found himself on the other! In the trenches, he assisted his brother as a medical orderly and both learned a great deal about wartime medicine. Miki carried stretchers, gave injections, placed tourniquets and tried to soothe, help and comfort however possible. The two brothers remained together, until Miki was wounded and hospitalized in Italy. I know little about the wound, apart from the fact that it was abdominal. He liked to tease my mother with stories of the pretty nurses who took care of him in the hospital, and I do not think the wound had lasting effects. What did however, was his

acceptance of non-kosher food. He recalled that as he and Gyuri were receiving their father's blessing prior to their departure to war, my grandfather had emphasized that they should both accept without humiliation the food offered by the army. It was well known at the time, that Jewish soldiers were often forced, under torture, to eat pork or other forbidden food, purely in order to provide entertainment for their tormentors. Many preferred to die, rather than submit. My grandfather's priorities were obviously somewhat more rational. While he fervently wished for his children to remain loyal and faithful to their upbringing (later exacting the promise of daily prayer from my father), the question of food was obviously less important to him. Above all, he admonished them both not to make unnecessary sacrifices. As a result of this, kosher food was never a part of my own childhood, ham and hot dogs were among my favorite foods.

Theoretically then, my parents met on that fateful day when they both entered their new positions at Placek's Department store. It seems however that shortly after she arrived, my mother fell in love with one of the two heirs apparent, Robert, the younger of Mr. Heinrich Placek's two sons. Robert was charming, entertaining, and, like Nelly's father, he was a womanizer. I know few details of the courtship, if indeed there was one, but in spite of the unthinkable changes in both their subsequent lives, I know that my mother maintained a special fondness for Robert, until his death, quite late in life.

The young people, employees and employers alike, soon formed bonds and socialized together. I think initially my father, always rather shy and quiet, rarely participated and stayed by himself, at his landlady's house, where he had rented a room. One outing, in which he did participate however, bears mention,

a room. One outing, in which he did participate however, bears mention, because both my parents enjoyed the memory so much. It too, gave rise to one of our future family catch phrases. On a beautiful summer day, a group of young people from Pláček's rented two boats and spent the day on the rivers around Brno. All were good swimmers, and all were in bathing suits, apart from one member of their group, a somewhat older man, who insisted on boarding the boat, fully dressed, in a thick woolen jacket and hiking boots. The young people were laughing, rocking the boat, and generally enjoying themselves. The older rather arrogant man, in my mother's boat, demanded that they behave themselves and not endanger his and their lives. This apparently resulted in more merriment, until, at the end of his endurance, the fully dressed man proclaimed: "I have had enough of this! I am disembarking!" And, in the middle of the deep river, he stood up in the boat, raised himself to his considerable height and - stepped overboard - jacket, hiking boots and all. Since he did not know how to swim, everyone participated in his rather dramatic rescue, my mother included. Next day, the local newspaper carried the story, much to the poor victim's chagrin. Since that time, if, within the family, we found ourselves in any uncomfortable factual or conversational situation, we would always say: "I've had enough of this! I am disembarking!"

Even though Nelly's personal life during the early years of the First Republic, was traumatic, fraught with conflict, worries about her mother and the disintegration of her family, memories of her social life were pleasant and reasonably happy. There was a period of friendship with a famous young children's writer and illustrator, Ondřej Sekora, whose now classic book *Ferda Mravenec* (Ferda, The Ant) was and still is on every child's bookshelf in Czechoslovakia. When, as a

young mother of two, I happened to mention to my friends who also had young children, that my mother had known Sekora, I shared vicariously, in her glory. Nelly was charming, outgoing and loved company. On the one hand, she spent a great deal of time with Uli with whom she shared her life; on the other, she deeply missed the friendship of her cousin Ilse, Ilse's three brothers who had been Nelly's childhood and adolescent companions and the family gatherings at their home. The fact that her mother's family blamed Nelly for Selma's fate and severed all contact with her, is something that I personally find incomprehensible and difficult to forgive.

One day, a year or two after Nelly and Miki had been working at Placek's^v, Nelly was surprised by a summons to the office of Karl, Robert Placek's^v elder brother. Karl was a wise, less glamorous and much more serious young man than Robert. He asked Nelly to sit down and, during the conversation, he raised the subject of her feelings for his brother. Although she was deeply embarrassed and confused, Nelly listened, as Karl emphasized the inappropriateness of Robert for her, they were incompatible he thought, emotionally as well as socially. Robert was not serious enough for "a nice girl like Nelly" and-- if she were not too upset by his opinion and willing to consider it, Karl thought that Miki Polgar (in the accounting department) was the best, kindest, most conscientious person he had ever encountered. Nelly should think seriously about forgetting Robert and becoming acquainted with Miki. Whether she was motivated by respect for Karl or felt a cooling off of Robert's ardor (perhaps he too had received a summons from his brother or even his father) is unclear. Nelly did gradually accept Miki's shy attentions and the relationship developed, initially rather one-sidedly as she later recalled. For him, it truly had been love at first

sight, long before she knew of his existence ; for her, it evolved from respect, admiration and, slowly affection. The deep love which characterized their lives together, came later. Miki proposed in 1928, with a lovely blue and white Rosenthal vase (still in my possession) filled with red roses and a diamond ring, which I also have to this day.

The first visit to Miki's parents in Kežmarok, to introduce the bride- to- be, was quite an ordeal for Nelly. She was preceded by a rumor that she was "not even Jewish", a scandalous proposition in the opinions of the many small-town friends and acquaintances of the Polgar family, particularly since there were several perfectly respectable and more acceptable local girls, in some of whom Miki had previously expressed interest and whose mothers' hopes he had raised. Secondly, rumor had it, that she was from a divorced family, yet another major strike against her! Little did they know, that her father had lived in sin(!) since her poor mother had never even agreed to a divorce. And thirdly, who trusted girls from big cities anyway? She probably smoked, wore blue stockings and - God forbid - trousers! Nelly subsequently reminisced about the visit with humor and affection. Her future father-in-law fell in love with her immediately and insisted that each time she walked out with him, to be shown to the community, she wore an old scarlet flannel dress, which Nelly disliked and had packed only to wear when she was helping with household chores. She had had a new wardrobe made for the visit, mostly consisting of subtly embroidered light colored silk dresses and outfits, but each time he was to accompany her, my grandfather asked her to wear "the bright red dress, my dear, we do want to attract our town's attention!" Even Fanny approved of Nelly's manners and demeanor and after questioning her at length about her culinary skills, she

presented Nelly with her own recipe book, so that Miki would be able to enjoy the dishes he was accustomed to from home. I remember many happy occasions at home, during family meals, when my father would gently tease my mother and remark how much better the particular dish was at his mother's (Mamuška's) table. My father never stopped supporting his family as long as they lived (most of them would not survive the Holocaust), yet there always remained some tension between at least my youngest aunt Gretchen and my mother, of whom Gretchen was slightly jealous.

My parents were married in the large Brno synagogue (the first to be burned to the ground by Hitler himself in 1939) on January 10th 1929, during a winter which is noted in the almanachs to have been one of the worst in memory. No one knows when the marriage was consummated. They arrived in Vienna for their honeymoon on the same day and before dinner, as the maid was unpacking their suitcases, Miki developed a raging fever. The doctor who was called, diagnosed influenza and recommended that Nelly remain as far away from him as possible! The fever lasted four days and Nelly entertained herself; after all, she was familiar with Vienna, she loved to shop in Kártnerstrasse, have coffee and dessert in the delicious bakeries , particularly the one belonging to the world famous Sacher Family. She did pay a visit to the family of Gustav Hayek, her mother's younger brother. Gustl had committed suicide a few years earlier, for what was rumored to have been financial reasons, and left a wife, Margit and two children, Nelly's cousins Anthony and Gertrude (Tony and Traudi). Gustl's first wife, Walli, had been beautiful, young and had played with dolls even after her marriage to Gustl. My mother loved to talk about "Tante Walli" and her dolls whom she had visited as a child quite frequently. Walli had

had heart disease and been told she could not have children, hence (probably) the doll collection. She died of the disease, aged about 27 and the family always wondered whether grief for Walli had not contributed to Gustl's own death; he had remarried relatively soon. His second wife, Margit, was an energetic intellectual, a journalist, who much later in life would contribute her own column as well as delicious Viennese recipes to the Manchester Guardian in England. Many Austrian intellectuals congregated at her home in the late twenties and early thirties and her household was obviously very different from that of the beautiful, delicate and playful Walli. The Hayek family in Brno (Gustl's elder sister Hermine and her husband Karl Mandl) were also not in contact with Margit, this time blaming Margit for Gustl's death. So Nelly's honeymoon visit to her deceased uncle's house was rather unsatisfactory. She remembered seeing the small children, Tony was perhaps four or five, Traudi was younger, with a governess. Margit refused to receive Nelly. Many years later, after the war, when Nelly discovered their whereabouts in England completely by chance, they renewed contact and we all became good friends. In fact the Hayeks were very helpful and supportive, almost forty years later, when once again, my own family and I sought refuge in England.

Miki and Nelly's honeymoon became another permanent joke and after their return, they were teased mercilessly by friends and colleagues at work. Their early years together were peaceful and contented. They returned from Vienna to a beautifully furnished apartment, complete with bed and table linen, china and silverware, initially also in the building of the Rosenthal Foundation. Mitzi had also trained and supplied a maid to help my mother. They became pregnant in November 1930 and I have always thought that the years from their engagement

in 1928, perhaps until 1937, when the threat of Hitler became real, must have been among the only few truly happy ones for both my parents.

Even so, both their fathers had died within a year of one another and I assume that the happiness of my birth was clouded at least for Miki, by the death of his father just two months previously.

My birth, on July 15th 1931 at three o'clock in the afternoon, did however precipitate an unrelated, but happy event for my mother. Miki had apparently just taken her, in labor, to the hospital (called the Beckmann Sanatorium) where she was to deliver, when he met Ilse, my mother's cousin, in the street. He had of course been sent away, and told to come back later. My birth took place long before fathers were allowed and encouraged to participate in the deliveries of their babies. So Miki was, in his words, wandering the streets of Brno, impatient and nervous. Ilse, who had not spoken a word to my mother since Selma had moved out of the home, and had not even attended their wedding, upon hearing that my mother was about to give birth, decided to accompany Miki back to the hospital. She had become a surgical nurse in the meantime, having studied in Prague. Her profession was to stand her in good stead and save her life and that of her father, not only during World War Two, in the concentration camps, but later during the wars in Israel, in which she would participate. So finally, after years of no contact, my mother and the Mandl family were reconciled and reunited. I, in turn, acquired close maternal relatives, previously precluded also by the fact that my mother was an only child. They subsequently played many important roles in my life and still do.

I was a big, healthy baby, weighing over 4 kilograms at birth. My mother was attended by a Dr. Ranzel and a midwife, Schwester (Sister) Prosser ,who had the reputation of a battle-ax, although my mother and she became friendly and my mother learnt a great deal from her. I was nursed for ten months and was never sick. In fact it was many of Sister Prosser's wisdoms and much of her common sense that my mother subsequently transmitted to me when I had my own babies. I in turn still use them in my pediatric practice. When Miki and Ilse returned to my mother's room that afternoon, everyone was so excited, that Miki asked the physician for permission to smoke a cigarette. He was told that of course he could smoke, his daughter would be exposed to many more harmful things in life, than a little cigarette smoke! At that time no one was aware of the extreme harm caused by smoking. Miki smoked for many years, before he decided to stop, which he did -from one day to the next, at about age 63.

The story goes that after my mother delivered and was told she had a little girl, she said, "Of course , I know; it's Renate!" She and Uli had chosen the name together and never even considered the possibility of a boy. Miki's first gift was an alarm clock, so that Nelly would not forget to feed the baby. Schwester Prosser told my mother that that was nonsense and, had my mother not objected, she would have thrown the "silly object" as she called it, into the trash.

My earliest memories are of walks with Manya and conversations with my mother. Every afternoon , on our walks, I would run into the opening in front of adjacent store doors, hide and say "boo!" I truly remember the delightful feeling when Manya would find me, pretend to be startled , and hug me laughingly. I also see myself sitting up on a high table (my changing table?) and watching my mother put on my warm leggings for winter walks (beige ones for every day,

white for special occasions). She would talk to me during those times, about the sun, the moon, my dolls, all of whom she knew by name. She would tell me how a little girl was her Mommy's best friend and how every Mommy was her little girl's best friend and how, together with their Daddies, they all loved each other more than anything in the whole wide world. My parents and I spoke German together, while Manya spoke Czech to me. As a result, I spoke both languages perfectly, in sentences, by the time I was two years old. I regret that I did not also learn Hungarian from my father at the same time. One day I had apparently done or said something I shouldn't and my mother told me I had to stand in the living room corner for two whole minutes. (So "time out" is not such a recent invention). I argued that I needed to go to the kitchen to Manya and when my mother would not let me, until I had completed my time in the corner, I complained, "So who is going to talk Czech with me?" My parents both spoke perfect Czech of course, but while I was small, I associated German with my parents and Czech with Manya.

Two birthdays have remained in my memory, my third and my sixth. My third birthday occurred while we were on vacation in Luhačovice. Manya was with us, and I was so excited that during our afternoon walk the day before, I told everyone who would listen, that tomorrow was my birthday. Imagine my surprise and my parents' embarrassment when we found our breakfast table in the hotel laden with presents from hotel staff, friends, strangers, everyone. Even the man who sold balloons on the street came in with three for the little birthday girl and the man who offered pony rides on the promenade, gave me as many as I wanted!

My mother and I were on vacation in Italy, when I turned six, in a small hotel near the beach. My father was not with us at the time, he was rarely away from work for more than a day or two. In the late afternoon of my birthday, there was a huge gathering of people around a gazebo on the beach, near our hotel, where, on the stage, Benjamino Gigli was singing Canio's famous aria from Pagliacci. The experience for me was visual, rather than auditory, and somewhat disappointing. My mother had enthusiastically and repeatedly informed me what a "great, great" tenor he was, and all I saw was a short little man, smaller than my father, wearing shoes with high heels!! However, since I was allowed to stand in the front row, I guess I can legitimately claim to have heard Benjamino Gigli! I certainly recall seeing him!

For the first two years of my life we lived in my grandparents' house, in the apartment prepared for my parents' return from their infamous honeymoon. I have no recollection of living there, but do remember the next five short years in a large apartment, also on the third floor, on Legionářská Street number 5. It had high ceilings and huge rooms, one of which was my green nursery with low furniture, airy yellow organdy curtains and big windows into the wide, tree lined street. My bed stood next to the wall, the head next to one of the windows. Five years later, I would lie in that bed at night listening with terror to the blood-curdling songs of the brown shirted Hitlerjugend marching back and forth beneath my windows.

Within short walking distance of our house, was a park, called Lužánky, Augarten in German, where we walked, played, rode tricycles and ice skated on the tennis courts in the winter. Brno is beautifully situated and although its

architecture is nowhere nearly comparable to that of Prague, its surroundings are lovely. Another of the parks, a little further away, with a medieval fortress at its summit, from which the Czechs fought the Swedes in the 14th century, is called Spielberg. The fortress, a historical landmark, with its medieval dungeons, torture chambers and instruments, came in very handy for the Nazis, after they occupied the country. Robert Pláček was imprisoned there and my mother was courageous (or foolish?) enough to attempt to obtain permission from the Gestapo to visit him.

I loved my walks with Manya and can still smell the pungent smell of leather when we stopped for coffee (raspberry juice for me) at the home and workshop of one of her friends, Mr. Bartošek, who was a cobbler. He always held the nails for the soles of the shoes he was repairing, between his lips. and the last (?) between his knees. I also enjoyed the tempting smells of pickled herring in our little neighborhood grocery store, which Manya bought for her supper but which I was not allowed to eat. I liked entering all the little shops in late fall, when days were short, the weather was turning cold and lights would begin to twinkle toward the end of our walk. Sometimes Manya would take me into one of the old churches in town, where she would cross herself and say a short prayer. She was and remained deeply religious. I would usually look around for a while, taking in the cool, dark atmosphere, the stained windows and smells of candles and incense. Then I would kneel on the velvet cushion, like Manya, say "Sh'ma Israel" and feel very important. One of my most fervent wishes was to participate in the procession when all the little girls were going to their first communion in white dresses with wreaths in their hair, carrying flower baskets. I begged Manya to let me be part of the festivities but she insisted I had to have my parents'

permission. I think I did succeed, on one occasion, in walking part of the way in a white sun dress, having made myself a funny little contraption of daisies to wear on my head. How proud I felt!

I felt no less proud however, and much more excited when, on Simchat Torah (the annual Torah festival) I was allowed to walk with all the other children, down the aisle of our big synagogue, waving a little blue and white flag with the Star of David . I remember one such occasion when I was playing in the park near the synagogue prior to the evening's festivities. I asked my mother at least a hundred times when it would be time to go and was she sure we would not be late. Finally, in exasperation she replied that if I was so impatient and anxious, perhaps I would like to go on ahead of her. The synagogue was perhaps around two corners from where I was playing. I took off, marching resolutely down the street (my mother following behind me) and arrived triumphantly at the locked doors of the synagogue. I have often wondered why that image has remained so vivid in my memory. Perhaps it was the pleasant excitement, the presence of friends, their parents, the early fall weather, the security of both my parents smiling proudly and encouragingly from the sides . I still don't know, but even now, when Simchat Torah occurs, I have a lump in my throat and wonder whether the children feel as I did, so many years ago.

Prior to the Nazi era and all that it implied , I remember only two situations which evoked a feeling of discomfort in me, a delicious sort of mystery which may have been fear. The first was the presence of a huge brownish black tongue of discoloration, left on the wall above our kitchen stove, after something had caught fire. Manya had been alone at home when it happened and managed to

put it out immediately. But before the painters came to repair it, I would force myself to look at it, run past it and feel shivers up and down my spine.

The second situation occurred if, after a walk with me, my mother would ring the bell at the downstairs entrance to our house, call to tell Manya that I was on my way and let me run up the three flights of stairs alone. Even though Manya would usually meet me half way, I hated the dark staircase and imagined all sorts of frightening things. In addition, I was happiest when my mother had no plans for the evening, and came up with me- to stay, read or tell me a story and put me to bed. That was the reason that Friday evenings were my favorite. My parents never went out on Friday evenings, Mitzi usually came to dinner (always bringing something for me of course) and my mother lit the Sabbath candles which added a secure, warm feeling of home. Those memories sustained me throughout the war and have never left me.

My parents played lots of Bridge, particularly on Saturday nights. I remember Tante Alma and Onkel Otto Lustig, Tante Sophie Neugebauer who had a large store with children's strollers and bicycles, and many others, all in their thirties; none of them survived the war. Manya would wash my hair and I would sit near the coal burning stove to dry it, glowing and secure, in my pyjamas and dressing gown, waiting for the guests to arrive. Onkel Otto had extremely thick glasses without which, he told me, he could not see. I recall watching him take off his glasses one evening. As I looked through the open doors of our dining room, where I was sitting on his lap, to the study, which was three rooms away, I could not understand how the furniture, the carpets, everything that was so clearly there, could be invisible. I asked him what he could see. He told me that everything was a blur, but beyond the dining room, there was nothing!!

Laughingly, he allowed me to “examine” his eyes - I was about three and a half at that time. To this day, I have never forgotten the cloudy gray shapes that I saw as I looked into his pupils. Some time later, my mother announced that she could not take me ice skating because she was going to visit Onkel Otto in the hospital. He had had an eye operation. Did he have early onset cataracts?

It was also fun to watch my mother preparing to go out in the evening. They went frequently to the theatre and to the opera and, as she was dressing and putting on makeup, my mother would tell me the story of the opera or the play she was going to see. So I had a childish understanding of many of the great operas and plays, long before I saw any of them. I also knew the names of many of the actors, artists, singers like Maria Jerica, who was from Brno, Emmy Destine, Leo Slezak, Caruso, and was fascinated by them. For example, when my mother told me about the famous actor, Basserman, I imagined a “Basserfrau” for him and invented plays in which they acted. At age five, I began to play the piano, and for some reason my teacher, Mrs. Fiala, chose very simple versions of many well known operatic arias and melodies as my first music. It was arranged for four hands, she played the base and I the treble. In this way many of the melodies were familiar to me when I began to be interested in hearing and attending operas, as I grew up. My first “performance” featured the overture to Die Fledermaus for four hands.

I had a friend, Gerda Wasserberger, who did not survive the war. She was two years older than I, her birthday was on August 28th 1929. She had lovely shiny dark curls, kind brown eyes and a milky white complexion. I still see her smiling from a large framed picture in a photographer’s window in post-war Brno, long

after she had perished in the gas-chambers. I wish I had had the foresight to obtain that picture which by then was just an advertisement for the owner of the store. We played frequently together, mostly at my house, with my toys, under my leadership. Gerda was a sweet, meek child who, I suspect, came from an abusive home. Her parents, Lola and Leo, were friends of my parents, but for some reason, I suspected that they did not get along. Gerda was often brought to our house quite late at night, would stay for a day or two, then go back home, always to my great disappointment.. Gerda came closest to fulfilling my wish for a sibling, which was reaffirmed after the war when my parents said they would have adopted her, had she survived.

Another indelible memory which involves my father happened when I was about four. My second cousin, Jiří (George) Mandl and I were friends and frequently played together ; with Gerda we formed an inseparable threesome. We even had a secret language. We ate at each other's houses went for walks together, sometimes with Jiří's nanny, sometimes with Manya. Jiří was the son of the youngest of the Mandl children, Benjamin(Beno). Hence his father and my mother were first cousins. Beno had fallen in love with a young eighteen year old girl, Helli, and when she became pregnant, they were married. The marriage did not work out, both were young, utterly spoiled and irresponsible, so very soon afterward, her family arranged a divorce and Helli and the child, Jiří, were brought home to live with her mother, a rich widow., whom we called Omi Paiker. My mother and Helli remained friends, Beno disappeared abroad.

On the particular afternoon in question, Jiří and I had been given some money to spend at the St.Nicholas market. St.Nicholas brings gifts to good children on

the night of December 5th. He comes through the chimney and if a child has been naughty, he leaves coal or other undesirable objects. (He is really a version of Santa Claus, only in central Europe, which is predominantly Catholic, Christmas itself is a much more religious holiday and Catholic children believe that it is the invisible baby Jesus who brings gifts on Christmas Eve and mysteriously places them under the tree. He does not descend through the chimney). St. Nicholas is more ecumenical and was quite acceptable to my (and many other Jewish) parents. All children love the St. Nicholas and two weeks later, the Christmas markets in town. There are stalls, lit by lanterns, selling special candy, hot chestnuts, the vendors are calling out and ringing bells, there is usually snow on the ground, and the atmosphere is colorful, romantic and exciting. Jiří and I were going to the St. Nicholas market with his nanny. My mother had no change, so she gave me a five crown (Czech currency is in crowns) note, emphasizing that I was allowed to spend no more than three. At the market, I fell in love with a paper St. Nicholas that cost five crowns. Although I was aware that it was wrong, I bought it, and, with a bad conscience, brought it home to show to my mother. She was angry, as I knew she would be and, to my surprise, she made me go back to the market, this time with Manya. She said I had to tell the man who had sold it to me, that I was not supposed to have bought it, and please would he take it back because I had spent more than I was allowed. Manya and I arrived at the stall with the poor Santa that I had loved and hugged in my grubby little hands and of course the man would not take it back, nor would he hear of returning my money. I announced that I would go and tell my Daddy all about this, because my Daddy's office was just around the corner from the market. So Manya and I trudged off in the snow and slush to Pláček's department store where I found my father and told him my tale of woe.

My joy knew no bounds when he said that I had arrived just in time, because he had been looking for just such a Santa to decorate the store windows and how could I have known that this was exactly what he needed? He asked me whether I would sell the Santa to him for five crowns. My mother could not believe her eyes when I produced the money upon returning home, but when she learned that I had sold it to my father, she agreed in all seriousness that I had been very fortunate. Although I don't quite know why, this episode has also remained with me throughout my life. My relationship with my father was quieter and somehow more peaceful than that with my mother. She was lively, loved to laugh, sing, joke, and invent games. He would hold my hand on our Sunday morning walks together, play word games and listen attentively as I skipped along, chattering incessantly. His nickname for me was Pipek.

Toward the end of my fifth year, I began having periodic stomach pains. Initially, no one paid much attention, but when they became more frequent, I was taken for an upper and lower digestive tract examination which also included a barium enema. Characteristically, my mother explained everything in great detail, and I was not only not afraid, but withstood the unpleasant procedures without complaint or too much discomfort. When the results became available, my parents were given the information which my mother was to recall over and over again throughout her life. "Das Kind hat den Tod im Bauch!" (The child has death in her abdomen!) Apparently on X-ray, my appendix had not filled with barium (the contrast medium) and was therefore considered to be severely inflamed. It could burst anywhere, at any time, and needed to come out - tomorrow! It did, one Sunday morning at ten o'clock, at the Brno Children's Hospital, in the summer of 1937. It was a wonderfully pleasant experience which

bears mention, because it highlights the differences between the postoperative care, provided for this relatively simple and common procedure then and now, some sixty years later. My most important memory is, again, that of my mother and pediatrician's detailed explanations of everything that would happen, from preparation, to the feel and smell of the chloroform and ether mask on my face. I was even allowed a whiff of chloroform in the pediatrician's office. I was shown the operating room, my room on the floor, with a bed for my mother who stayed with me for the whole ten days after surgery, and the little closet with open shelves where I could bring favorite toys and which would house the new ones that the nurse, who was showing us around, was convinced I would receive from adoring visitors. Everything went according to plan. I was not allowed to move after surgery, had to lie on my back for five days! For five days I was also not allowed to eat, and was given lots of tea to drink. I still remember the taste, initially quite bitter, later sugar was added, much to my relief. After that I was on a diet for six months, the substance of which I no longer recall, was not allowed to participate in gym classes, ice skating, swimming, or any other physical exercise, and had to wear a pink "corset" or belt which laced on either side of my abdomen. All that, I assume, was to protect the suture which was already almost invisible a few weeks after surgery. I greatly enjoyed the attention of course and clearly remember the pattern of the wrapping paper (cream background with thin burgundy colored stripes) used by the largest toy store in Brno. Whenever anyone came to visit with a package, I would secretly look for the familiar pattern and feel the excitement of yet another delightful surprise. After discharge from the hospital, I was supposed to stay in bed for another two weeks. I should add that the post-operative care described here, was routine for every child after an appendectomy. The only difference was, that I had a private room with a

second bed for my mother. Most rooms in the children's hospital had three to six beds.

The most interesting consequence of my surgery was the memory of a long (perhaps five to six inch) pale, white, some four millimeters thin worm that sat in a bottle of presumably formalin, on top of the toy shelves in my hospital room. Some twenty years later, my mother almost fainted when I arrived home one afternoon and announced, without preamble, or introduction to the subject, that I was convinced that my appendix, at age six, had not even been inflamed, let alone represented "death in my abdomen". I explained, that in medical school, I had of course seen many pathological specimens, and not one of them had appeared grossly as benign, as pale and white, without signs of swelling, inflammation, redness, or other pathology, as the appendix that had remained in my memory from so many years ago. My mother was appalled and refused to believe that the operation might not have saved my life. She had lived through the war, convinced that, whatever else happened, at least I would not die an unnecessary death from a perforated appendix. We will never know. Private medicine had its mysteries, even sixty years ago.

I started school at age six and although first grade passed relatively uneventfully, at least for me, it was the last year we were to spend in peace, as a happy, normal family. I was usually met by my mother after school. My favorite occasions were, when she would smile mysteriously and say, "Today I have a surprise for you." And we would go to the cinema, to see Sonya Henny or Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs or to a children's performance at the theatre. She reveled in creating an atmosphere of fun, excitement and inventing little

secrets. Not even the worst circumstances, when she was in hiding during the Holocaust, having assumed the identity of a complete stranger, prevented her from giving pleasure and preparing little surprises for to those around her. Perhaps these little episodes gave her even more pleasure than to those for whom they were intended. Perhaps they were a coping mechanism.

March 11th 1938 was my father's fortieth birthday. We were in Mitzi's dining room having a festive meal with candles. But instead of the usual comfortable and for me pleasantly secure feeling of our family atmosphere, I sensed a complete change. The adults, uncharacteristically, were paying no attention to me (the center of their universe), no one was smiling, my father was not opening the present I had made for him. Everyone looked worried, gazing silently at one another, their faces reflecting fear and horror. The radio which someone had switched to an Austrian station, was blaring military marches, Hitler was screaming one of his speeches, interspersed with the rhythmic, grating shouts of "Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!" of his fanatic audience. It was the day of the Nazi occupation of Austria, The Anschluss. After that day, our lives gradually took on a drastically different character.

I still went to school, had my piano lessons, our daily walks and Sunday family outings continued. Perhaps the first change I noticed, was the slowly decreasing number of little girls who attended my gymnastics class twice a week. It was a private class for girls and one boy, who allegedly had had a head injury at birth and a metal plate had been inserted into his skull in early infancy. Consequently, he was considered to be "delicate" and usual boy activities would have been dangerous for him. He also had a sister in our group, and both of them came

regularly to gymnastics, accompanied by their nanny. It is interesting to note, that we all took his presence among us completely for granted, he was treated as one of us, no one teased him and he seemed to accept us as equals also. He and his sister were the first ones to leave the class. One day, the nanny appeared alone and in answer to my question, my mother told me that the children, with their parents had emigrated to America. A few months later, we learned that the nanny had followed them . Three other girls left the class relatively soon after and, as we children were showering and changing in the locker rooms, we gradually noticed that our waiting mothers' conversations began to be interspersed with new words like "emigration", "affidavit", "anti-Semitism" and others. With the characteristic perception of 6 and 7 year olds, we also noticed that our parents were more preoccupied, and less actively involved in our activities . They seemed to talk more quietly , many seemed anxious, some were even tearful.

At my public elementary school , religious instruction occurred in the early afternoon hours, separately for each denomination. My parents were liberal, so my own religion classes consisted of lessons in modern Hebrew. There were some twenty of us in the class, from several different schools. There too, children started disappearing, and at the end of the school year, there were perhaps sixteen of us left. We were the unlucky ones. After the war, the few who had emigrated and I were the only ones left alive from my Hebrew and gymnastics classes.

Our happy family dinners every Friday evening were suddenly shared by visitors, strangers, whom my father usually brought home from Friday evening

services at the synagogue. That too, was new. He had previously always hurried home from work on Friday evenings, but only after his 40th birthday, in other words, only after Hitler's occupation of Austria, did he begin attending synagogue regularly on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. I will never forget one occasion when a husband and wife joined our dinner table. They were from Vienna and told how the wife had been pulled from her bed in her night clothes by the Gestapo who had broken into their home, and chased out into the street. The husband had been taking a bath and had time only to wrap himself in a bath towel. Their two children had been shot on their way out, as their mother led them, also in their night clothes, by the hand. I do not know the names of the family, I do not know if they survived the war or not. I do know that what befell them was not an isolated incident. After the Anschluss, many Austrian Jews fled their country into nearby Czechoslovakia, thinking, hoping mistakenly, that they would be safe. They frequently came to the synagogues, since there they knew they would find compassionate hospitable people willing to help. We began to have guests not only at the Friday night dinner table, but also overnight. Some stayed, some had children with whom I would play and share toys. But usually, no sooner had we become acquainted and somewhat used to each other, they would disappear as mysteriously as they had arrived. My father later told me that he and many of our friends had helped to smuggle some of the refugees out of the country, to France, to England, others remained in Czechoslovakia and found a few short months of temporary respite under its still free, compassionate democratic government.

Why did my parents not decide to flee if they were so eager to help others?

There were many reasons, the strongest of which was that which they had in

common with so many millions of other families. No one believed that Hitler was a true threat to Jews or anyone else. Even after hearing the horror stories from Austria, people were convinced that they were indeed isolated incidents and that the perpetrators would be punished. Furthermore, this all happened in a different country and could not happen in Masaryk's democratic, tolerant, freedom loving Czechoslovak Republic. Humans rarely believe the worst, and, after all, bad things always happen to others. Many Jews in Bohemia and Moravia were professionals, living integrated, secular lives, they were contributing meaningfully to society. The opinion most frequently expressed was that a government would not work to its own detriment by persecuting or destroying valuable, productive members of society. What had been happening in Germany for the past five years, since 1933, and what was happening in Austria now, was just a temporary aberration. If the worst came to the worst, argued a minority of hard-core pessimists, Hitler may decide to relocate Jews to other parts of the country or possibly even to other parts of Europe.

The majority of the community however, my own family initially included, ignored the warnings of enthusiastic young activists who were sent from Palestine to organize meetings in Austria, Czechoslovakia, other countries, and in animated speeches, encouraged people to leave Europe while it was still possible. Only a maximally idealistic few were willing to give up comfortable, successful social and professional lives, in exchange for the hardships of physical labor in the desert, with its unknown future and dangerous environment. Of those who did emigrate to Palestine, many came from Germany, where Hitler's intentions and actions had become a frightening reality. These mostly young, fit idealists, became the core of the future builders of the State of Israel, the founders of the

kibbutzim, the conquerors of the desert. Others who had the means, like a few of my classmates and their families, emigrated to the west. This was an enormous undertaking, requiring financial as well as logistical resources, guarantees of security abroad and of course the physical and emotional upheaval of relocating a whole family to a different country with a different language and culture.

My Uncle Hans Mandl, my mother's cousin, traveled to Palestine in the late thirties and he, too, tried to persuade the family to leave Central Europe as soon as possible. He was an outspoken, outgoing, ebullient person, with an over-abundance of confidence who loved to sing and give loud speeches. He was one of a few, who after the war, which he survived working for the British Army, had the insensitivity to say to the miserable little group of survivors of the Holocaust, "I told you so! You should all have listened to me!"

In August of that year, we spent what would be our last vacation as a family with my paternal grandmother Fanny in Kežmarok. Since my father's elder brother, Gyuri and his family (Aunt Wally and my cousin Walter) as well as my Aunt Jolli, her husband Rudi and cousin Vera, two years older than I, all lived in Slovakia, we usually spent time during our Kežmarok visits, with all of them. Gyuri would sometimes take me as well as Walter who was four years older than I, and behaved very protectively toward me, on house calls in the village. We would

only be allowed inside, if there was no obvious danger of infection, or if the patient was a friend of the family. I enjoyed those visits to the houses of farmers, other villagers, including the teacher, the postmaster, the parish priest, who lived next to the church in a lovely, dark old house where on one occasion, Walter and I got lost and quite frightened. There was a carpenter once whose wife was sick, and while we were waiting for my uncle to finish examining her, he made a little wooden bed with a wooden doll for me, and told me that I too, like my uncle, could be the little doll's doctor. Walter had a whole farm of wooden toys made by the same carpenter. One day I asked Uncle Gyuri, why he always spent so much time inside people's houses and he responded that if he really wanted to get to know someone, he had to see them at home, in their own bed! He also had a surgery and regular office hours.

Aunt Jolli and Uncle Rudi were my mother's favorites. Jolli was young and pretty, perhaps less serious than the rest of my father's family and she and my mother would laugh and have fun together. They would all go to concerts or the theatre, when they visited us in Brno, and Vera and I would stay up late with Manya. Rudi was the postmaster and I loved the dark spacious building of the village post-office, which smelled of wood, paper and ink. I also remember many sunny hay-rides with Vera, Walter and lots of other children from the surrounding villages, as well as swimming expeditions to the river and lakes with drinks of cool water from a tin cup that was always tied to a tree next to a deep well.

My father's two youngest siblings lived in Kežmarok. Hugo, whose nickname was Potzak was a bachelor and he lived with his mother. Gretel, with husband and little son, Tommy, had a house nearby. Hugo was a dear, funny man who

loved children: he never failed to find something in his pocket, not only for me, but for all the other children who followed him around in the street. He invariably teased my mother, who loved to dress me in pretty clothes and white shoes, by bribing me with candy, other rewards or surprises, if only I would crawl in the mud outside or “help” in the bakery next door, so that my clothes would be covered with flour. The dirtier and messier I managed to become, the bigger the reward and the more he would laugh when he saw my mother’s face. He wanted her to let me run around naked, like all the other children in the little town.

And then there was the “Bauchweh Onkel” (the “tummy-ache uncle”). Whenever we arrived to visit my grandmother, according to small town custom, friends would call at the house, to welcome the new arrivals. So usually many of the Hartmann siblings and their spouses would visit and there would be coffee, delicious desserts, fruit, whatever my grandmother had prepared. One of them, his name was Alexander, would always arrive with a big bulge under his jacket, complaining of a terrible pain in his abdomen. He would ask me to feel if I could find the pain and help him get better. I would feel under the jacket and there, to my surprise, would always be a doll for me. He contributed quite a large proportion of the thirty six dolls which I owned before the war! They were always beautiful. Many had real hair, eyes that closed, with long lashes, and some said “Mama”; all came equipped with clothes, combs, brushes. And of course, Uncle Alexander was always relieved and grateful that I had cured his “Bauchweh”. My mother had a friend among the Hartmann sisters, whose name was Elsie. Elsie loved to travel, read, and was a skilled pianist. She and my mother had common interests. They enjoyed one another’s company and became close.

Elsie was to play quite an important role in my mother's life later, during Hitler's occupation.

The only great-grandparent I ever met and of whom I have any knowledge, was my great-grandfather Schlesinger, Fanny Polgar's father. He lived to be one hundred, in a small house on the main street of a little Slovakian village, called Kráľova Lehota (loosely translated as the King's Hamlet). I know nothing about his wife who had presumably died long before my time. The Polgar children and their cousins apparently spent many summer vacations with these grandparents and my father reminisced rather ruefully that he was never a favorite with his grandfather who was quite strict and demanded discipline from his numerous grandchildren. Apparently Miki was a somewhat overweight boy (difficult to believe, since as an adult he was always extremely slim and without any effort, remained so to his dying day). His grandfather's nickname for Miki was Smolinski (later used in the family's secret correspondence during the Nazi occupation) and the fact that he was not very athletically inclined, apparently also failed to endear Miki to his grandfather. My Uncle Gyuri was said to have corresponded more to his grandfather's image.

My own memory of this great-grandfather stems from one particular visit to his home. I see a tall erect white haired man with a white moustache, long white beard with a bent pipe as long as his beard in his mouth and a cap on his head. He wore a white starched shirt, with a small round collar and bow tie. He spoke German with me, Hungarian with my father and uncles, and Slovakian with the

cheerful, round , rosy cheeked Veronika, who kept house for him. He had a habit of walking to the railway tracks near his house and setting his watch by the express train that stormed past every day, supposedly punctually at noon. He took me with him when we visited in 1938, and allowed me to wind his watch. It was a huge, golden object, attached to a chain in the top left-hand pocket of his waistcoat. He must have been 94 years old at the time, because in 1944, when he was 100, the Gestapo entered the village. One day soon after, my great-grandfather set out at noon, to meet the train and set his watch as usual. The frantic Veronika warned him not to leave the house, as did some of the neighbors who saw him heading for the tracks. A group of armed German soldiers was walking toward him. "Stop, you dirty Jew!" they shouted, having been informed by some helpful citizen of the village, who he was. My great grandfather apparently drew himself to his considerable height and proclaimed: "I have been taking this walk for most of my life and I will not be stopped now!" He was shot on the spot.

Shortly after that vacation I had started second grade, when my father was suddenly called up to join the army. He was a World War I veteran and already forty years old, yet he, like others of his age, was included by the Czechoslovak government, in the general mobilization which took place in September of 1938. I cannot write honestly, that I recall the will and eagerness with which the soldiers looked forward to defending their fledgling democracy, I am aware of that from history. I do recall the crowded Brno railway stations, soldiers leaning out of carriage windows, to sounds of military music and men singing.

There had already been a great deal of unrest at the northwestern borders of Czechoslovakia with Germany , in the part of the country called The

Sudetenlands, where the majority of the population identified with Germany and German culture. Henlein, a strong supporter of Hitler was their leader and the activists who provoked much of the unrest, particularly against Jews and Czech patriots, were called "Henleinites" (Henleinovci in Czech). They were clamoring to go back to their German Fatherland as regular citizens. "Heim ins Reich" was their motto. Many fictitious incidents of alleged shootings of German citizens were reported by their Nazi supported propaganda machine, persecution of Jews for non-existent crimes, burning of their homes and businesses was rampant and, in general, an atmosphere of fear of Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia, prevailed. It was to prevent such an invasion, that the Czech military force (one of the best prepared and best equipped in Europe at the time) was called upon to assemble in the Sudetenland.

I do not remember my father's departure, but he and my mother must have decided that we would be safer in Slovakia with my grandmother, because that is where we returned, toward the middle of September. Much to my delight, Gerda Wasserberger, my good friend, was allowed to come with us. For us, it was a prolonged vacation and initially, we felt none of the tension experienced by the adults. The issue of missing school was never raised; the whole country was in a state of prewar tension and in the anxiety of generalized mobilization (a concept which soon became familiar even to us children) no one worried about a few missed days or weeks in second or any other grade. Perhaps schools were even closed, I no longer recall.

Many unforgettable memories in my life are olfactory ones, and the exquisite fragrances of those glorious days of late summer and early fall under the Tatra

mountains, are no exception. One particularly beautiful evening has remained with me forever. It was already dark, there was a full moon and Gerda and I were playing, running up and down a flight of stone steps in one of the parks near my grandmother's house. A group of adults, my mother included, was standing some distance away from us, deep in conversation. I was fully aware that it was long past our bed-time because at that time we were not allowed to be outside after dark and if a rare exception was made, it was only on condition that we firmly held onto the hand of an adult. So the freedom of the darkness and the sharp, clear air of early fall, mingled with the smell of smoke from the chimneys of the nearby town, were intoxicating. I truly remember feeling so elated and happy, that I actively wished that the night would never end, and that my mother, who seemed to have forgotten us, would never call to take us inside. Since that time, I have often wondered whether that night has remained so indelibly ingrained in my memory, because perhaps it was to represent the last, absolutely carefree, unburdened moments of my childhood. The ensuing months were not unequivocally unhappy ones. But the events that followed, including the sudden awareness of Jewishness as something undesirable, became such an inseparable part of our lives, that there is no doubt that they deeply affected even those of us who were children, in spite of our parents' best efforts to protect us.

That was the night that, for the first time in my life, I saw tears in my father's eyes. We were sleeping in one of my grandmother's bedrooms, my mother in a large double bed, I in a smaller one, on the other side of the room. A knock on the door in the middle of the night awakened me and I heard my mother's surprised voice, as she asked, in an uncertain whisper, "Miki???" It was indeed he. Together with everyone else, he had been discharged from the army, and,

like the rest of the troops, ordered to disperse, without a shot having been fired, without a chance to defend their country against the threat of invasion by Hitler's hostile forces. The soldiers had apparently been told that diplomatic solutions were being considered by the great European powers, namely France, Czechoslovakia's greatest military ally, bound by treaties and promises of loyalty, and Great Britain. The position of the Soviet Union, although unclear, seemed to lean toward Czechoslovakia, because of ethnic, linguistic and other ties between Slavic nations.

The diplomatic negotiations had already taken on frenetic proportions. Lord Runciman, the British foreign minister had met president Beneš in Prague, asking him not to mount a military campaign against Hitler, since that would only be seen as a threat to peace in Europe. Masaryk had died, aged 87, on September 14th 1937, having foreseen almost everything that was to befall his country. Meanwhile, Mr. Neville Chamberlain had visited Hitler several times, exacting from him promises of non-aggression. I knew few details of these events of course, but was aware that our lives had changed. The adults became increasingly preoccupied, they seemed afraid and more and more people we knew were disappearing. The radio was on most of the day and my parents could no longer protect me from hearing about increasing numbers of incidents in the Sudetenland involving killings of Jews, burning and destruction of their businesses and synagogues, all, we were told by German radio, in retaliation for Jewish acts of aggression against the supporters of Henlein. Some of these fictitious "acts of retaliation" also found their way into other parts of the country and no one appeared to feel safe any more. Finally, toward the end of September, the general tension culminated in the conference which has forever

remained in our minds as symbolic of one of the most deplorable, despicable decisions in history. It was the Munich agreement 'about us, without us' ('o nás bez nás' in Czech) where the great powers of Europe, Mr. Chamberlain of Britain, M. Daladier of France (our ally) and Mussolini , agreed that Hitler should take possession of the Sudetenlands and incorporate them into the German Reich proper, in return for a promise that he would not invade the rest of Czechoslovakia, nor would he instigate war elsewhere in Europe. Adolf Hitler gave his word. Mr. Beneš and members of his cabinet were in Munich at the time, but not in the same hotel. They were not invited to the discussions, nor were they informed of the agreement until after the fact, when the delegates were already dispersing. Mr. Chamberlain arrived home to a triumphant welcome, waving his umbrella, uttering the words for which he will never be forgotten: "Peace in our time !" Churchill, on the other hand wrote that Britain had had a choice " between shame and war. We have chosen shame and we will get war."

Five and a half months later, Hitler was in Prague and in Brno. This time it was the birthday of my friend, Jiří, his tenth, on March 15th, 1939. I see myself standing in my parents' bedroom early that morning, staring at my mother's tear-stained face, watching my father pacing, as he always did when he was upset, back and forth, back and forth, from the window to the door. "Everything is going to be alright" my mother reassures me. "We no longer have our good Mr. President, we now have a new country and a new leader who will take care of us. You are to go to school as usual, just like on any ordinary day." "Hitler???" I exclaim, " Is Hitler going to be our president? I don't want him, he is wicked, bad and cruel!" My mother was visibly shocked by the vehemence of my reaction . I

assume that she was not fully aware of the extent to which the tension, the fear and the news of recent events had trickled down to us children. They had all tried to protect us but the mere occurrence of a sudden interruption in the conversation of adults when they thought we were within earshot, was sufficient to heighten our anxiety and increase, rather than decrease it. "What do you know about Hitler?" she asked, "how can you tell that he won't be a good president?" "He will take my Daddy away and put him in prison! And then our Daddy will never come back to us, I know!!" I sobbed uncontrollably. My mother tried to reason with me: "But we have a good, dear, kind Daddy who has never harmed anyone, nor has he ever done anything wrong. Why would anyone ever want to put him in prison??" "But that's just it!" I cried, "Hitler tortures and murders good, innocent people all the time!" (Years later my mother commented that she had not dreamt that I had ever heard, let alone understood the words 'murder' or 'torture').

I did not go to school that day and my father was indeed arrested on the next, and detained in the Spielberg prisons, although on that occasion, he was released four days later. On March 16th also, our beautiful synagogue (called The Great Synagogue) went up in flames and was burnt to the ground. This was the synagogue where I had accompanied my father so many times, reaching up to hold his hand, to which I had brought flowers on High Holidays for my mother and grandmother, the one where I had so proudly walked up the aisle on Simchat Torah, with my little blue and white flag. It has never been rebuilt. The invaders also torched the second, slightly smaller synagogue in Brno, leaving only one, a small, rather inconspicuous building, of which perhaps they were

unaware. It exists to this day and the tiny community who survived the war, never had enough members to fill even its ground floor sanctuary.

As the Nazis stormed into Brno, with tanks, canons, armored vehicles, motorbikes and motorcades, the streets were lined with silent, weeping citizens. Here and there an isolated voice would shout "Heil Hitler! Some fanatics waved German flags bearing the swastika that became such an indelible symbol of fear. Some stores already had swastikas in their windows and were the first to display the "Juden verboten" (Jews not welcome) sign. One of them was our favorite bakery on the square, as well as two or three grocery and department stores, all in the center of the city. One could not help but wonder where they had obtained the dreaded flags, why and how had they prepared so well for the invasion which was an unexpected devastating event for most of the Czech and Moravian population. Only weeks later, it became an act of resistance, punishable by imprisonment for a shopkeeper not to display these signs. It was these individuals, so eager to display swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans from day one, who became the most fervent collaborators, the most dangerous traitors for the duration of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia. (And it was some of those same opportunistic, spineless individuals who were also the first to collaborate and cooperate with the Soviet invaders of Czechoslovakia, some thirty years later, after the Prague Spring of 1968).

Slovakia was not occupied in 1939. They were separated from Bohemia and Moravia which became known in World War II political language as the Protectorate (of Hitler's government). Slovakia, with its many fascist supporters under the leadership of Hlinka, became a "free" independent, Nazi friendly state

until 1944. This is an interesting issue. I doubt that the majority of the population of Slovakia favored the fascist and Nazi philosophies. However I suppose it must have been hard to manifest overt antagonism and risk occupation and terror, similar to that to which their Bohemian and Moravian countrymen to the west were now subjected. An independent "free" state was probably preferable, particularly since the relationship had not been ideal, even in the best of times, under Masaryk. The Slovaks had always felt somewhat inferior and resented that Czechs had a greater number of leadership positions in Slovakia than their own people. Furthermore, while not ideal and far from free, the situation for Jews in Slovakia was somewhat easier for a somewhat longer period of time than it was in the Protectorate. Since the Nazis were not the direct occupiers of the country, which was under the control of the fascist Hlinka Guardists, Jews were conscripted for forced labor, lived under restricted privileges, curfews and other discriminatory measures, but transports to concentration camps were not organized until around 1944, nor was the "final solution" enforced in its entirety until that time. That is not to say that many Jews were not killed, their property stolen, businesses destroyed, long before the "friendship" between Slovakia as a free state and Nazi Germany came to an end. Thus in 1939, Czechoslovakia became Czecho - Slovakia with Bohemia and Moravia under the "protection" of The Third Reich.

THE PROTECTORATE OF BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA

After Hitler's occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, our lives changed from bad to worse. Daily edicts and decrees began to appear in the newspapers as well as in the form of posters throughout the city, regulating all aspects of Jewish life. Large businesses were taken over by reliable loyal Nazi "representatives" and rightful owners were initially delegated to menial positions, later fired outright. This happened also at the Plaček Department Store, the Plaček family was already working on emigration. My father who was left in charge of the administration of their considerable wealth which included much property in the city of Brno as well as elsewhere in the country, was fired early in April. My mother, still attempting to protect me, tried to convince me that it would be wonderful to have my father at home, finally available to spend more time with us. I knew better. Although I was still allowed to attend school, my predominating wish was to be like the majority of my classmates who were non-Jewish. I learned to scrutinize carefully their facial configuration and I remember pulling my eye-lids and pushing at my cheek-bones in front of the mirror, in an attempt to look more like my image of what was non-Jewish. I wished my eyes were blue, my hair lighter, I wished my nose did not have a bump in it. Most fervently, I wished for what I thought were their care and fear free lives, as opposed to my own which had become full of dark secrets and the heart stopping scenes of brown-shirts in the streets as they either marched and sang or as they surrounded someone and beat him (usually it would be an older man with a hat and a beard) or made him kneel in front of them and scrub the sidewalk. My parents continuously emphasized that I should speak to no one in the street, not even people I had known from before, I should answer no

questions, I should be polite and always refer them to my parents or my teachers.

I remember an episode when Jiri^v and I were walking home one day; it must have been late spring, early summer, because I see the sunlit street before me and recall wearing a short sleeved blouse with a navy blue pleated skirt. A gray-haired short, stocky woman addressed us in German and, although we told her, politely, that we were on our way home from school and in a hurry because our mothers would be worried about us, she insisted on accompanying us. First she asked us why we thought our mothers would be worried if we were late. Then she began to question us about our lives, how many people lived in our households, what our parents discussed in the evenings, whether we ate kosher food, whether our fathers worked and where and what we thought about joining the Hitlerjugend. My mother was frantic when I finally arrived home and made me describe the woman and repeat every word and every question over and over again. She emphasized and reemphasized how important it was that I never speak to strangers again and that from now on, I would be taken to and from school by an adult. That evening a uniformed policeman rang our door bell, asking for my father. They needed him for "questioning". I insisted on waiting up until he came home, feeling my mother's tension and fear. Above all of course, I thought that it was I who was the cause of the policeman's visit. I never found out whether the woman's questions to us were in any way related to the episode or not; my father came home, in the early hours of the morning and in answer to my questions later, he told me that the police had needed information from him about some of the Placek^v accounts. My piano lessons stopped because one of the decrees prohibited music from being performed in Jewish homes.

We had moved from our previous apartment in Legionářská Street around November 1938 (after Munich) to a more modern but smaller one with central heating on the fifth floor of a quadrangle of apartment blocks, in Příční (Cross) Street in Brno. I never asked my parents why we moved. All I know is that I went to school one day from the old one and came home to the new one. My grandmother Polgar was staying with us at the time. I clearly recall that the smell of the new apartment was quite different from that of the old one. This one had an elevator and I learned to distinguish its sounds, as it started in the basement and stopped on each floor. I knew exactly when it stopped on our floor and recognized familiar and unfamiliar (frightening) footsteps approaching our door. We also had secret "family" bell signals, known only to us, Mitzi, Manya, the Wasserbergers and other close friends. It was this apartment that was located in what later became one of the Brno Ghetto streets (among the few in which Jews were allowed to live) and which then housed five families, including my parents. I regret that I never asked my parents whether they had heard rumors about ghettos and perhaps even had information about their future location, when they chose the apartment, or whether its selection was completely random. They were to live there for two and a half years. One of our rooms, the one that housed my piano, was a corner room, which adjoined at right angles a corner room of the building next to ours (the block formed a quadrangle, as mentioned before, with a lawn and fountain in the middle). Thus if one tried hard, one could see - and hear - and the latter became important- what was going on in the adjoining building, particularly if windows were open. The people at right angles to our apartment were Nazi supporters and conversations could only be whispered if we were anywhere near the room or window in question.

Furthermore, they had complained to the concierge (fortunately sympathetic to us) that they had heard sounds of piano playing from “the Jewish apartment”. If the noise did not stop immediately they said, they would complain to higher authorities than the concierge whom they suspected of and threatened with being a Jew friend (Judenfreund) .

Gradually, as the spring of 1939 progressed, we were no longer allowed to go to the swimming pools, skating rinks, to certain cinemas or theatres, we were prohibited from frequenting some stores and could only shop at certain times of the day. Our Sunday outings with friends stopped also and I remember a series of Sundays when Jiri’s mother Helli’s family took me with them on long walks and trips to the country. Helli was not Jewish and although divorced from her Jewish husband (my mother’s cousin Beno Mandl) the family remained loyal to some of their Jewish friends and were willing to risk what for them, at that time, was probably still a minor, nevertheless definitive infraction against regulations, namely that of taking a Jewish child on an outing. I enjoyed those outings, the men all carried walking sticks and wore “plus-fours” with high boots, the women had split skirts and hats with little feathers, and Jiri and I were always good friends. In spite of the exciting anticipation and the enjoyment my pleasure was usually somewhat tainted by my parents’ numerous admonishments to be careful, not to speak to strangers and , if possible, to act as if I truly belonged to the family. So even at that age (I was seven and a half) I was clearly aware that my presence could potentially endanger Jiri’s whole family.

Somewhere, sometime during that spring, my mother heard about and attended a lecture by George Lansbury who was visiting Czechoslovakia at the time. Like

domiciled in Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Mexico and Panama, remained in contact with me throughout the war, with my parents for as long as it was possible, as well as with friends who, she knew, were connected with us.

Grace Beaton's letter was followed, one week later, by another, this time from a Mr. Harry Daniels who lived in Flixton, a suburb of Manchester. He and his wife Edna, he wrote, had a little boy, Harry, (we first read it as 'Hanny') who was five and a half years old, and they could have no more children. They would be delighted to take care of Renate, for however long was necessary, and Harry would love to have a big sister. Mr. Daniels looked forward to hearing from Mr. and Mrs. Polgar. My parents were shocked and numb. My mother had probably also not expected a response to her letter and certainly not one so concrete that the remote thought of sending her child away, albeit to safety, would become a reality.

What my parents did not know then, what my mother never found out at all, and the rest of us learned some fifty years later, was, that a movement already existed, at least in Germany and Austria, the goal of which was to organize the rescue of children from Hitler occupied Europe and transport them to England. That movement, now known as The Kindertransports, was instigated in Czechoslovakia, by an exceptional human being, an Englishman named Nicholas Winton. He was twenty nine years old and in the winter of 1938, had been planning a skiing vacation in Switzerland, when a friend called him from Prague, to describe some of the events taking place there, in which the friend thought Nicholas might be interested. So, instead of skiing in the Alps, Mr.

many other perspicacious politicians and activists (he was the chairman of the British Labor Party) Mr. Lansbury foresaw the true danger of Hitler, not only with regard to the reality of imminent war, but he also spoke about his belief that Hitler was serious about eliminating the Jewish population. My mother who understood and spoke good English, was impressed by him, and, on the spur of the moment, decided to write a letter. She addressed it to Mr. George Lansbury, care of The House of Commons, London, England. In it, she explained our situation, that we were Jewish, that she had a seven year old little girl for whose safety she was concerned, and that she would be grateful for any information about the possibility of emigration to England. She also took the liberty of enclosing a snapshot of her little daughter. My mother's friends laughed at her. Did she seriously think that her letter would be delivered - let alone answered? Her standard response, which she was to repeat each time she recounted the story, was "So what? I have lost more in my life than the price of an envelope and a stamp!"

Just five days after my mother had sent off the letter, a response was received from a Miss Grace Beaton, London. My parents were shocked and afraid. *"Dear Mrs. Polgar, I have the honor of writing in the name of Mr. George Lansbury, who, as you know ..."(she didn't) .. " is a gentleman of eighty years. We are delighted to have received your letter and will do everything in our power to bring your little girl to our country as soon as possible. Please bear with us and we will try to find her a home that will be as safe, as secure and almost as happy as your own."* Miss Grace Beaton, who later became the General Secretary of War Resisters International, an organization based in London, with members

Winton entered the post - Munich, pre - Nazi occupation Czechoslovak Republic.

Prague was full of refugees, some from Austria, many from the annexed Sudetenlands; many people were in camps waiting for exit visas to the west. In addition to multitudes of displaced families, Prague was also swarming with various organizations, particularly the Nazis were already visible and taking over some components of social as well as commercial life, despite the fact that they would not march into the country until some three months later. There were also humanitarian groups in Prague, attempting to help people to escape. In his interview with Ruth Davis, recorded for the Czech and Slovak Jewish Communities Archive in 1991 and published later in Phoenix (ref.), Mr. Winton mentions the Unitarian Church, the Quakers, members of the British Parliament (I assume that is how my mother was able to hear George Lansbury's lecture) as well as an organization called The British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia. The purpose of all of these was to help prominent adults and political refugees to escape.

In his extraordinary perspicacity, Mr. Winton realized that no group or individual existed whose sole purpose was to consider helping the children of Czechoslovakia. He acted rapidly and efficiently. Since no organization for children existed, he decided to establish one. He had paper printed under the heading of the British Committee for refugees from Czechoslovakia, and, since he was not a member, he "pinched the name" (sic!) and formed a subcommittee, entitled Children's Section of the British Committee! In London, since the name of the Committee commanded some respect, the Home Office

had no objection to admitting children to the country, as long as British families would care for them until they reached the age of eighteen, and a fifty pound sterling deposit was paid for each child. In his characteristically humble way, dismissing any credit he may have deserved for the whole process, Mr. Winton describes how relatively difficult it was to find families for the children. An article by him was published in the Picture Post in 1938 and he initially distributed photographs of the children to various organizations in Britain. Later he had the idea to distribute postcards with photographs of six children per card and this, he said, enabled potential families to choose their child. So his "import license" per child, as he laughingly calls it in the 1991 interview, consisted of a 50 pound sterling deposit and a family who would care for the child. In Prague, chaos reigned. During the Christmas of 1938 which he spent there and later, thousands of applications and pleas for help came in day and night. I am uncertain as to which and how the children were chosen. In London, several organizations adopted the cause. My own picture, the one my mother had enclosed with Mr. Lansbury's letter, somehow found its way into a little publication distributed to Quakers. That is how the Daniels family - Mr. Daniels was a member of the Friends or Quakers - found and, I assume, chose me. We learned later that Miss Grace Beaton, who stayed in touch with me and my parents throughout the war, and frequently sent me little age appropriate presents, mostly books, was also a Quaker and a member of War Resisters International. She lived together with her mother, in a flat in London. Incidentally, that little photograph in a Quaker publication was to play another interesting role in my life, 29 years later, when our family once more sought refuge in Great Britain.

Mr. Winton, who was a stockbroker, with the help of his mother, Mrs. Barbara Winton, spent every afternoon and evening of that early spring (in his interview he mentions that the stock exchange closed at 3.30 p.m., so “there was plenty of time”) organizing, contacting families, typing letters, almost single (or double) handedly. He mentions that the Gestapo was not particularly interested in his activities, they followed him around when he was in Prague, which was annoying, but he encountered the greatest difficulties with Čedok, the Czechoslovak travel agency. Čedok, still in existence today, is an acronym for Československá dopravní kancelář (Czechoslovak transportation office) apparently charged exorbitant fees and continuously increased them, for the loan of the trains to be used for transporting the children. In spite of enormous obstacles and what must have been many discouraging and heartbreaking experiences, Mr. Winton saw the first of what were to be six transports of children from Czechoslovakia leave Prague in March of 1939.

Thus Nicholas Winton saved the lives of 664 children who left Prague in a total of five transports from March to August 1939. In just four short months, this young British stockbroker achieved what later, whole nations were unable to achieve. He rescued many generations of future children, their origins in the Czech lands. My own Kindertransport, the fifth, was the last to leave and arrive safely.

The sixth was prepared on the platform of the Prague Wilson Station on September 3rd 1939, carrying 250 children. That transport disappeared. No one knows what happened, not one of the children has ever been heard from again, their fate will forever remain unknown.

I should add that several Kindertransports had already arrived in Britain previously, from Germany and Austria, but Mr. Winton is responsible for the lives of those of us (as well as our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren) who left Czechoslovakia in that summer of 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. He and his mother, Mrs. Barbara Winton, met every transport that arrived in London. I wish I could say that I remember him. Our arrival in England was chaotic and frightening. I can however write with conviction that I will never forget him.

It seems that where the public is concerned, this enormous contribution remained dormant for at least fifty years. One day , Mr. Winton was sorting through papers, wondering perhaps what to do with the old documents from 1938 and 1939. He happened to mention them to Dr. Betty Maxwell, wife of Robert Maxwell, the newspaper tycoon . Suddenly, Mr. Winton's whole story was published in the Sunday Mirror (he found the choice of newspaper amusing), and shortly afterwards, in 1991, at Dr. Maxwell's instigation, Mr. Winton was invited to Israel for a spectacularly moving reunion with "his children", in the presence of President Václav Havel. The original documents are now at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem. Some years later, Mr. Winton was invited to Prague, where. also in the presence of some of " his children" , he received an award on behalf of The Czech Republic, from the hand of President Havel.

At the time of this writing, Mr. Winton is living in England. In his nineties, he is president of the Abbeyfield Society for the Elderly, as well as of the local branch

of the Royal Society for the Mentally Handicapped. {Together with his wife, they had a child of their own, with Down Syndrome. What irony!! - just a comment by R.L.}

Asked by Ruth Davis, at the conclusion of the 1991 interview, what he would do to help someone today, Nicholas Winton responds: "The world's in such an awful mess, I don't know what I'd do. I'd start a movement, first of all, that did away with all religions and taught ethics. Having failed in that, I'd try and do away with all nationalities, then perhaps we'd have a peaceful world."

How anybody, once they're able to believe in a God, can worry whether they honor God by being this, that or the other, and then fight over it, is absolutely beyond me. I just don't understand it. I mean, if you can believe, why should you worry if somebody else believes in a slightly different way?" (quoted verbatim from p.76 of Phoenix).

As my mother read and reread that first letter from Mr. Daniels, I cannot begin to imagine what it must have felt like to think about sending her only child to a foreign country, to live with people unknown to her, for an unknown period of time, not knowing whether we would ever see one another again. In addition, this was a decision that she had to make virtually alone. My gentle, loving, wise and thoughtful father usually deferred to Nelly in all major matters in their life.

"Wassoeben Du machst, mein Kind, wird sicher nur zum Guten sein." (Whatever you do, my child, will surely be for the best) he said although I am sure it was

equally hard for him, if not more so. Knowing my mother I can imagine that she partially enjoyed the attention that her idea attracted among her friends and my friends' parents. Miki was always more reserved and rarely shared his concerns. His own mother, my grandmother Polgar, was unequivocally against the whole affair, as was Ilse, now married to Otto Pirak, my mother's cousin and closest friend and confidante. Together, she and my grandmother insisted that a child's place was with her mother; Fanny Polgar had raised six children and if there had been a fuss each time there was a crisis with one of them, there would probably be nothing left of the family by now! Their view was absolutely accurate of course - under normal circumstances. These were not normal circumstances. For some reason my mother was one of only a few who truly believed that our lives were at stake. In the meantime a correspondence evolved between my parents and Mr. Daniels. He described their little house in the suburbs, a bungalow, he wrote, (which had to be looked up in the dictionary), their garden (we had always lived in apartments) their cat, Billy. Five and a half year old Harry would occasionally sign his name in huge block letters and add a few X's (also a first for us) for kisses.

Whether or not she believed in the reality of my departure, my mother, ever practical and proactive, decided that I should begin to learn English. Jiri and I started lessons together. We were taught by a Miss Blum, a kind, gentle person, perhaps in her late twenties or early thirties, with brown hair and glasses. The first thing we learned was to say 'how do you do?' and respond with the same words (Jiri and I later incorporated it into our secret language - backwards - (o du oy o dwoh) not exactly a successful palindrome, but we liked it! Next we had to learn to pronounce the English alphabet and with it the following riddle rhyme: Y

Y U R, Y Y U B, I C U R Y Y 4 ME. Our lessons took place in Miss Blum's apartment in Brno. No one knows what happened to her after the war, none of us ever saw her again.

So we learned English and against the protestations of the whole family, my mother began to assemble things for me to take with me. In the meantime instructions began to arrive almost daily, with lists of permitted luggage: we were allowed 20 kilograms each, in two suitcases and one backpack or one piece of hand luggage. These communications came from the International Red Cross as well as from the group called War Resisters International. The latter were based in London, many of their members were Quakers and they formed the nucleus of what is now Amnesty International. I assume that they were all members of the groups or organizations which had originally been contacted through the initiative of Nicholas Winton.

Although I finished second grade, the situation under the Protectorate was becoming increasingly difficult. More and more stores, parks, places of entertainment and education were forbidden to Jews, more and more of my classmates began to avoid those of us who suddenly, much to our surprise, were openly identified as Jewish and therefore not only different, but somehow mysteriously even responsible for Hitler's occupation of and antagonism toward Bohemia and Moravia. I wondered what I had done to be told by one of my former school- friends, "This is all your fault!" She used the plural "you " in Czech and as I looked around, wondering who was included in the 'you', she said, "Vy, vsichni Židi!!" (All you Jews, using a colloquial term for the word Jews). My parents tried to maintain a semblance of normality and when I did not

accompany Jiří's family on weekends, the three of us, occasionally with Gerda, would take long trips on Sundays, far out into the country in order to avoid popular forbidden picnic locations. Sometimes we would encounter frightening groups of youths, members of the Hitlerjugend, marching in their brown shirts and boots, singing the blood curdling songs about Jew hatred and Jew slaughter that I had heard only at night from beneath my bedroom window in our old flat. The sounds were frightening even then, but now, as we tried not to walk on the same side of the road or path in the wood, as they (for eye contact could attract their attention and result in harassment) their very existence was terrifying to me.

Jiří and I continued our English lessons and my mother and I paid many visits to the dressmaker and to the few clothes or shoe stores where we were still permitted to shop. Two suitcases, one brown and one black, now occupied a permanent place in my parents' bedroom and I remember my mother, pencil in hand, consulting the endless lists of things ,instructions, names and labels which kept arriving in the mail. Both my parents, but my mother in particular, began to tell me about the little brother I would finally have, (I had always wanted a brother or a sister) the garden we would play in together, and the kitty we would cuddle. While I was interested and excited and certainly not apprehensive at that time, I was conscious of an unusual awareness of something unknown and possibly ominous looming in the distant future. I could not have described it, but since I knew my parents were worried, as were all their friends, the general mood affected me also.

In spite of everything, I mostly continued to enjoy my life, played with my friends and probably liked the many new things I was receiving, even though most were too big, so that, as my mother emphasized, I would be able to grow into them and not cost Uncle Harry and Auntie Edna - as we had begun to call Mr. and Mrs. Daniels - too much money. In all honesty, I do not recall thinking too much or too seriously about the future. Several letters were exchanged between the Daniels family (it was always Uncle Harry who wrote) and my parents. I can't help but wonder if, throughout all the preparations and discussions, my mother didn't perhaps hope that something would intervene to prevent my departure, perhaps she never truly believed that it would ever come to pass. I have never been able to imagine how she could have coped during that spring and early summer of preparation, had there not been at least a modicum of denial to help her move from one day to the next.

My father, always quieter, more reserved than my mother, was probably deeply worried , yet convinced that his beloved Nelly was doing the right thing, he suffered privately and alone. Furthermore, I have to assume that both of them hoped and believed that they would follow me to England. There was much talk about "married couples" obtaining visas to England, he as a butler, she as cook and / or housekeeper in wealthy households. Such visas or entry permits were apparently easier to obtain than those whose applicants were professionals or did not indicate employment. I never found out whether my parents had truly applied and were waiting for a wealthy family to sponsor them, or whether they hoped to apply once I was safely out of the country; I shall never know. In any case my father was also learning to be an optometrist and make eye glasses. Once I learned what a butler did, I often tried, unsuccessfully, to imagine my

father in the role. I had no doubt whatsoever that my mother would have made an excellent cook and housekeeper, just as long as she was given complete control of the household and freedom to do things her way.

In answer to some of my questions about England, I had been told that, in contrast to our own country, Britain was a monarchy. In other words, there was no president, instead, there was a king, a queen and two princesses. Their names were Elizabeth and Margaret Rose and they were about my age. They must have captured my imagination, because, one evening, as my parents came home, they found a letter on their bedside table, with an accompanying note, asking them please to mail it. I had written to the princesses and a translation follows.

' My Dear Princesses, My name is Renate and I am coming to England. Please ask your Daddy, the King, if he would allow you to play with me. I am writing in German, because you probably don't understand Czech. And apart from that, times are bad. (" Und ausser dem sind schlechte Zeiten.") Yours Renate.' The letter survived the war and I still have it. My mother often speculated what might have happened, had she sent it.

Time rolled on relentlessly and the date for the fifth children's transport was set for midnight on July 31st 1939, just sixteen days after my eighth birthday, from the Prague Wilson railway station (named for president Woodrow Wilson in honor of his role in the establishment of Czechoslovakia). The luggage was prepared, sent on in advance. I do not recall its traveling with us. The final communication that my parents received from the International Red Cross, was

an alphabetical listing of children included in this, the fifth Kindertransport from Czechoslovakia. There was my name, between Polak Peter, born 1923 and Polinecer Gerda, born 1927, my date of birth, the name of the family in England who would care for me, and their address.

On July 15th I had my eighth birthday. Curiously, although it was my last at home, and must have been unbelievably sad for my parents, the only thing I remember about it is, that I received my first English birthday cards, one from Harry, another from Uncle Harry and Auntie Edna. We had never seen cards especially printed for an eighth (or another numerical) birthday. I know the day must have been particularly festive, with lots of presents, many of them good-bye souvenirs of home. One of them was an autograph book which my thoughtful mother retained and later sent on to me in England with little inscriptions, rhymes, messages and drawings from my friends and relatives. The messages later became incredibly poignant, since many of the contributors did not survive the war.

My parents decided that we would spend the last ten days in Prague. On about the 20th of July (I do not recall the exact date) I said good-bye to my grandmother Mitzi, to Auntie Ilse, to Gerda and to Jiri^{yy}. Everyone came to the Brno railway station. I remember tears, but not much else. Manya came too. She had already had to leave us, because, since Jews were no longer allowed to have help from Aryans, she could not move to the new apartment with us. However, she remained characteristically loyal and under penalty of arrest, came to visit, brought food and helped in as many ways as she could. She would continue to do so, as long as my parents were around.

After our departure, another letter arrived from Grace Beaton, dated July 23rd 1939, addressed to my mother. *" My Dear Mrs. Polgar, I have received your letter about Renate's coming to England. I will arrange everything for her with Mrs. Placek and Mr. and Mrs. Daniels. You may rest assured that I will do everything I possibly can, - just the things I imagine you would do as her Mother. These days must be terribly hard for you and you are much in my thoughts, but you may be happy in the thought that your little girl will be loved and cared for and she will be received into Mr. and Mrs. Daniels' home just as one of their own children. I trust this knowledge will make these coming days a little less difficult for you and your husband. I promise you both, everything I can do shall be done.etc. With every best wish and the assurance of my friendship, Yours sincerely, Grace M. Beaton."*

My recollections of the initial days in Prague are sunny and happy. My mother and I stayed in a hotel, we bought ice-cream, swam in the river, where permitted, met friends and had fun. It is to my mother's credit that the vague dark cloud which had been part of my not quite normal life during the past weeks at home in Brno, was suddenly lifted. In Prague, during that last holiday together, I had my mother to myself, we laughed, she told stories, we read books, played games, we had our secrets. England was mentioned as something pleasant that I thought about with excitement, a birthday-like anticipation. My father joined us for the last four to five days. I remember the three of us went to the photographer together, I happy and secure in the middle, between both my

parents. I was wearing a dress belonging to Gerda, lent to us by Aunt Lola, her mother, because my own nice clothes (appropriate for a photograph) had been packed and sent off. For some reason I have never forgotten what that dress looked and felt like.

On the very last day in the afternoon, my father took me to the Prague Zoo to see the elephants. I remember seeing a nail on the ground and asking my father anxiously whether the big elephant would step on it and hurt his foot. My poor mother was at the hotel, preparing my hand luggage and sandwiches to put into the new backpack which I was to carry. I can still smell those sandwiches which took on the odor of the new canvas backpack. There was salami in some, Wienerschnitzel in others and pickles which I liked. Toward evening I slept in the hotel bed. Then it was time to go to the station. It was dark that summer night in Prague, though not as dark as it would be exactly one month later when World War II was declared. In the car, it suddenly occurred to me and hit me like a bolt of lightning, that I was going away - from my parents, from my home, from everything I had known, everything that had been familiar, everything that I had loved. I was going away alone, a tiny girl, alone in the world.

I started to cry, bitterly, begging my parents not to make me go, begging them to take me home, to let me stay with them, not to send me away. I cannot begin to imagine the torture they must have felt.

We finally arrived at the station which was alive with organizers, chaos, unbearable noise. Parents and children were all trying to say their good-byes. Many were crying, babies and small children were screaming, adults sobbing. Suddenly the noise and confusion were interrupted by a loudspeaker which

instructed all the children to go to one side of the station hall and the accompanying parents to the other. Many children had to be physically torn away. All of us who were traveling were given labels to tie around our necks. I did not know how to tie a bow at the back of my neck; my mother was gesticulating encouragingly from the other side of the hall, but of course she was unable to help me. My label had a number (which I do not recall) my name, and London - Victoria Station, written on the other side.

I will never forget the feelings, the misery, the smells and the sounds of that night at the railway station in Prague. The hands of the huge clock were approaching midnight. I sometimes still dream about that clock and have since learned that other Kindertransport children do too. I was sobbing in a crowd of children - most of them bigger than I, in my little beige trench coat, a brown hat, my backpack on my back (ugly khaki), the label on my tummy. I had finally realized that I could tie the bow in front and turn the label around. My parents were on the other side of the hall, smiling bravely, encouragingly and waving to me.

As I write this, it occurs to me for the first time, that, neither throughout the days in Prague, nor on that last night, in fact throughout the whole period of preparations for my departure, I did not see my mother cry. She cried easily and tended to dramatize situations, at least after the war she did. I suppose that that is not surprising if one considers all that she experienced and survived. But during the one, arguably most dramatic and significant episode of her life, letting go of her only child to an unknown, unpredictable future, she did not cry in my presence, even once. She had tried, smiling bravely, to describe the sunny

garden, the little brother, the kitty, and the loving Auntie Edna and Uncle Harry who would take care of me, until she and my father could come and take me home. Not once, during that fateful spring and summer, did I have the feeling that my parents were sending me away because they rejected or did not want me with them. I understood clearly, at the age of seven, that they were acting selflessly because they were trying to save my life. Not once, during the weeks and months of desperate homesickness in England, did I experience feelings of hostility or resentment toward my parents. Not once did it occur to me to question their judgment, so convinced was I that their decision was inevitable, necessary and without alternative.

In this respect, I think the three of us differed from many other families, in which the children resented their parents' actions, felt unwanted and rejected and, in the few instances in which they were reunited after the war, described feelings of resentment, hostility and an inability to resume a loving parent child relationship. I was in my late fifties when I happened to see a British televised interview, entitled *No Time To Say Goodbye*, with two men and two women, all slightly older than I, who had been sent to England on a Kindertransport. All four expressed feelings of hostility and betrayal toward their parents, particularly when they failed to follow their children to England, as they had promised. One of the women described how impossible it was for her to live with or resume a loving relationship with her mother, who had survived concentration camps. The interviewer commented empathetically that the youth of all four interviewees at the time of departure, obviously precluded an age appropriate understandable explanation that would have justified their parents' actions in the minds of the children. How wrong that interviewer was ! While I cannot know the details of

the situations of the four individuals, I am forever grateful to my own parents for their honesty, their detailed explanations and for the sensitive way in which they prepared me. Of course I hoped that they would follow me to England, but when they did not, I did not feel betrayed. There was no doubt in my mind that they had been forbidden the necessary permission about which there had been so much discussion among the adults at home. This is not to say that all subsequent family relationships between parents and children of Holocaust survivors were ideal. Much has been written about this most complex of subjects. In this section, it was my intent merely to emphasize the effects of my parents' honesty and common sense, upon my ability to cope as a child refugee, alone in a foreign country. They did something very difficult, very right, in a very appropriate way, although neither had had a course in psychology and I doubt they had read books about it. Never for one moment did I doubt their love, the sincerity with which they promised to try to follow me to England, or the fact that what they wanted more than anything in the world, was to have me with them.

For most of my adulthood I have wondered about my parents' states of mind and their coping mechanisms during the time of that, perhaps most painful and protracted decision making process of their lives. The next few years would force both of them to face multiple vital decisions, but they would all be sudden, requiring immediate action; they would be literally momentous. During the spring of 1939, they had six or seven months, 180 long days in which to reach and reverse, reach and reverse the decision whether or not to send me away. Could I / we have done what they did? Would I / we have done what they did?

What I had forgotten, or more likely what I had suppressed, was, that for 25 years I had had, in my possession the closest thing to an answer to at least some of my questions. Hidden away, in a file labeled, in my hand writing, “valuable documents”, I had 33 typed pages of my mother’s own words, describing her experiences during the war and its aftermath. I had never found the strength or courage to read them. Like Nicholas Winton in 1991, my parents had also been interviewed, in the early days of her career as an oral historian, by Ruth Davis, for her Czech and Slovak Communities Archive. The meeting occurred in Brno, in my parents’ apartment. At Ruth’s request, it was in German which she found easier to transcribe than Czech. In 1975, Ruth sent me a transcript of their conversations of which the following is an English translation. I have tried to convey the original as faithfully as possible.

The interview occurred thirty six years after the beginning of the events in question. Nelly was initially tearful and reluctant to revive all her memories, so Miki began to recount their story, quietly listing individual events in chronological order. In half a typed page, he had covered six years and was back in Brno, in 1945. As she listened, Nelly became characteristically more animated; Miki’s brevity irritated her. She interrupted, added details and eventually took over the narrative. My father had spoken calmly, in perfect classical German. My mother, anxious and more emotional, also spoke in German. However, occasionally she would interject Czech sentences and phrases and many English ones, partially for Ruth’s sake, but also because she was reliving her (and my) English memories. Hence her direct speech, which follows, sounds sometimes less fluent than it might have been, had she been calmer and better prepared.

There were many pauses during which she wept, while Ruth sometimes wept with her.

Nelly:

We began to think about leaving in January. Then when my husband was arrested on March 17th, we were quite sure. Life became more and more difficult for Jews and we wanted our child to be raised in freedom. We were shocked at her reaction when we told her of Hitler's occupation of our country. We had no idea that she had ever heard the word 'murderer'. I thought that her world consisted of Little Red Riding Hood and Snow - White. I had a close friend at the time (Uli Hirsch) and together we decided that I would write a letter to Mr. George Lansbury at the House of Commons in London. And five days later, this was in May, we received a response from a Miss Grace Beaton, on behalf of Mr. Lansbury, informing us that they would try to find a home for our little girl, where she would be taken care of and be almost as happy as she was in her own home. We were terribly shocked and afraid and I sat down immediately, thanked them and wrote that we were not sending the child away. It had been a crazy idea. Before I could send it off however, before we even knew what we wanted, another letter arrived, this time from a Mr. and Mrs. Harry Daniels from Flixton, near Manchester. All this had to do with the Society of Friends and War Resisters International. Mr. Daniels was also a Friend and they had their newspapers and there was an announcement: 'Who will take a child?' And there was also a photograph, yes? And in this letter, Mr. Daniels writes that he feels with us and that they have a little son of five years, Harry, who wishes for a big sister who will be able to tell or read him fairy stories every evening. And the

doctor told them that they could not have any more children, so ‘ we decided to ask you to lend us your little daughter. We are promising to do everything to make her happy and we hope that we will all survive the bad circumstances in your country.’ The latter my mother quoted verbatim, in English, from memory. Then she resumed in German. “So, that was the letter. It was terribly moving , touching and warm. I still have it all”.....crying.. “ And we replied immediately that we were ever so grateful, but we were in such a moral dilemma, an only child, not quite eight years old..... we still don’t know what to do. In the meantime we could no longer go swimming, Jewish children were not allowed to play in the park. We had Aryan friends who sometimes took her secretly for weekend outings in their car and brought her back. Two weeks later we received a communication from the Children’s Committee in London, that our child had been included in a transport that would leave Prague’s Masaryk station at midnight on July 31st 1939. We were to send her luggage ahead, three days prior to departure, to an address in Prague, to be inspected by the Gestapo. It was to contain only children’s clothes, inclusion of jewelry or other valuables could endanger the whole transport. The child was to be brought to the station at 10 o’clock at night, carrying one small backpack, with one change of underwear, one pair of pyjamas, toiletries, tooth brush etc. Everyone in the family disapproved. My mother-in-law,(our Mama in Kezmarok) wrote that she had had six children and not one of them would she have given up. The rest of my husband’s family was also against our decision. Unfortunately, we could never tell my mother-in-law that, in the end, Renate was her only granddaughter to survive the war. One grandson, Walter, whose father was a doctor and was also murdered by the Germans, survived. All her other grandchildren, together

with her children and their spouses, went to the gas chambers. She herself did not survive Ravensbrück.

So we began to buy school clothes, shoes and other things, so that the Daniels family would not have to buy anything for at least two years. That was still financially possible for us, and of course, no one dreamt that it would take seven years. There was more correspondence in the meantime and I asked if they had any special requests, like a school uniform or something else and Mr. Daniels responded that that was all unimportant, the main thing was that Renate should remain happy and healthy. An interesting thing happened toward the end of June. We received a letter written in German, by a Dr. Nathan, who introduced himself as an acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Daniels. He and his family had emigrated from Germany, through Prague, to England, and since Mr. Daniels, like so many other English people, was sensitive and kind, he had asked Dr. Nathan to enquire on his behalf, about our wishes for Renate's religious education and upbringing. Did we wish for her to be raised in an orthodox environment, eat kosher food, please would we express our wishes openly and honestly. Dr. Nathan added that they too, had two children and were looking forward to meeting our little daughter. We responded immediately that it was extremely considerate of Mr. Daniels to ask about this, that we had a completely liberal household, did not keep kosher, nor did we desire an orthodox education for her. We were extremely grateful for everything he and Mrs. Daniels were doing, and we agreed, also in answer to another question by Dr. Nathan, that Renate could accompany little Harry to Sunday School. (Dr. Nathan himself had recommended that we permit her to do so).

Before she left, we took her to Prague for a last holiday. She knew that at the end of the holiday, she would leave for England. We had told her the whole time that she would finally have a little brother there, like she had always wanted, but England was far away and she had to go on a long journey first, by train and boat, with lots of other children. Then she would be with Uncle Harry and Auntie Edna and little Harry and we would try to follow as soon as possible. We did try to get a "married couple's" permit but it was no longer possible. It was too late.

At the end of the holiday in Prague, we brought her to the station on July 31st at 10 o'clock that night. There was lots of noise and confusion and children. And suddenly they pushed us out very quickly. Without saying 'good-bye', nothing at all, very categorically. They were right of course". ..Here my father interjects into the conversation: "The last transport. The last transport. No good-bye." Nelly continues "Well, if you begin to kiss and kiss and"(crying) " anyway they truly threw us out. Out of the station hall. Not the Gestapo, no. People from the Committee. There was a doctor, social workers, nannies, nurses. But they asked parents to leave so that they would not become sentimental and say things like 'Darling be well, stay healthy, be good and don't forget me !' They allowed us to go onto the platform and between 10 and 12 o'clock, they registered the children and so on. We were five couples from Brno and we waited on the platform together for those two hours. So five children traveled from Brno on that transport. And then, suddenly at midnight, a door opened and the children filed out. Completely different children, some deathly pale, others red from crying. All of them were looking at the ground, not one looked up. Perhaps they had been

told they were no longer allowed to look at their parents. Perhaps they had all suddenly realized what was happening to them, even though they knew. We had always described England as a reward to Renate and something exciting and pleasant. They were put into wagons in alphabetical order. The train, at least the engine, seemed very small for such a long trip. (It is interesting what one notices under extreme stress, isn't it?) And then they said that mothers of children under six, could board the train for a moment, but not mothers of older children. Renate was just eight, but I was not disciplined enough and I jumped in . My husband stood below on the platform. I came to the compartment and she was crying bitterly. 'Mutti, why must I go away?' ' So that you can stay healthy and well. We will come soon.' Suddenly someone from behind took hold of my arm, I don't know who, someone from the Committee, and said, 'We have already asked you not to make things more difficult. Please leave the train immediately!' Naturally, she was right, the woman from the committee. I came down and I expect that Renate was, of course, much more upset than before. Then the train began to move. There were perhaps five wagons of children, with that small engine. There were also two wagons at the rear, with young Czech adults who were going to Germany into forced labor camps. They were hanging out of the windows, singing Czech patriotic songs as a sort of resistance (They were singing ' Ta naše písnička , česká, ta je tak hezká, tak hezká!) .And, as we stood there in a terrible, terrible emotional state, we suddenly realized that that little engine could never travel through Germany, Belgium, Holland, to Dover or wherever. For God's sake what had we done? Where were they taking our children? ?? And we saw a conductor and asked him , ' For goodness' sake please, where are they going?' And he said that the train was being shunted from the Masaryk station to the main Wilson railway station. We realized that they had not wanted to cause a

bigger uproar than necessary, by having the children assemble at the main railway station, and had chosen the smaller one instead. But the departure would indeed be from the largest railway station. So I cried, ' Miki, come! A taxi! ' I was running, my husband behind me and the other parents behind him. It was raining, I was crying, all of us were running. We asked the taxi driver to take us to the Wilson station as near as possible to wherever a small train would be coupled onto the international express. The station was near and we had no difficulty in finding the train with the five children's wagons coupled onto the rear. We knew approximately where they were and found the two Muntz boys from Brno, who were in Renate's compartment, standing at the window. They were twelve and fourteen. The boys were bewildered as they saw us. 'Where are we?' they asked in Czech. We told them that they had only been shunted and had not left Prague yet. I asked them what Renate was doing, was she still crying and they said no, not any more. The children asked where their parents were, only two of the other Brno couples had followed us, the other two must have thought we had gone crazy. At that moment Renate appeared at the window. She, too, asked where they were. She smiled a little, between the tears, waved and smiled a little more. Ten minutes later the train pulled out. We were able to send kisses, wave and then they were gone."

I do not remember how many of us there were in the train compartment together. I do know there were two bigger boys from Brno who were kind to me. I think my mother had asked them to watch over me. One of them begged me to look out because my parents were standing on the platform, just beneath our window,

but I refused. I was crying and I did not want them to worry even more .

Subsequently I regretted repeatedly that I denied my parents that last glimpse of their little Renate. As the train started to move, I became hysterical. I don't know if my parents heard or not. We thought we were leaving Prague but it turned out that we were being shunted from the Masaryk Station, via the other large railway station in Prague, called the Wilson Station. Somehow, some of our parents found out about this too, and, as I learned later, at the instigation of my mother (who else's?) they bribed a taxi driver to take them at break-neck speed to the Wilson Station for perhaps another glimpse of their children. It was there that I did see them for the last time, my mother in an elegant hat, silk dress and gloves, still smiling bravely, waving, sending kisses, probably somewhat elated by the success of her sudden idea, my father appearing calm, glasses blinking, in a dark suit, holding her elbow, also trying to smile in his characteristically gentle way.

The journey took about 40 hours and although I don't remember everything about it, several details have remained with me. At the German border, the Gestapo inspected the train and our luggage. I was lying on a lower bunk - bed, covered with the red, brown and beige woolen blanket with my initials RP, embroidered by my mother, in large brown letters in the corner. It had been purchased especially for the journey and today, sixty one years later, it is one of my most treasured possessions. One of the Gestapo officers shook my shoulder and asked if I had any valuables. I had been told to be polite, speak in German and to show my little Swiss wrist watch with the red strap, a present from my father, the gold bracelet from Omama Mitzi and the gold necklace with my guardian angel, an exquisite miniature set in gold and pearls with which my mother had replaced another necklace that I had had since birth. The latter is

visible on the photograph sent to George Lansbury. I think my mother kept and carried it with her everywhere she went. (I had the new one throughout my entire stay in England, never took it off, and for about a year after my return home. It was lost on a railway platform one night, as we were returning from a school skiing trip. My parents always said it had done its duty and no longer felt needed). The Gestapo officer told me I could keep my things and left. At the Hook of Holland lots of kind, smiling ladies in hats boarded the train and distributed cake. I did not want any, although, to be polite, I tasted it, together with the tea that they offered . Later I realized that that had been my first introduction to fruitcake. I still remember how dry it was, yellowish, with raisins. Various types of fruitcake are popular in England (for Christmas, birthdays and other festive occasions) but since that August day in 1939, I have never been able to acquire a liking for it. I do not remember feeling sick during the channel crossing, although many children were. I do remember the pervading smell of that whole journey, a mixture of new canvas (my backpack) pickles, Wiener Schnitzel (my favorite) cookies (vanilkove rohlíčky, Manya's present) all richly flavored with the salt of my tears each time I found yet another delicious surprise accompanied by tender little notes and messages from my mother, father, Mitzi and Manya.

We arrived in London at Victoria Station (I think - although some transports arrived at Liverpool Station) on the afternoon of August 2nd. My predominant emotion was one of envy of those children who were being met by at least one parent (some fathers had left Czechoslovakia ahead of their families and were now meeting their sons or daughters). Some had been accompanied to the station in Prague by grandparents, now left behind, and were even being met by both parents. I cannot describe what I felt as I watched those reunions. The

majority of children had no one in England and were going in groups to homes which would be organized for them, others were going to a Czech boarding school which I later learned, was in Wales. Even those I envied because at least they would be together, from the same country, speaking the same language. The prospect of my new little brother, the kitty and the garden somehow seemed very unreal, distant and much less attractive, as I stood all alone - or so it seemed - I don't know if anyone waited with me, in the middle of one of the busiest railway stations in the world. I was to be met by Mr. Karl Pláček, my father's former boss, the owner of the department store in Brno. They had left Czechoslovakia in 1938, but prior to that, I had played with his two children, Stephan who was my age and Vera Elizabeth, a little younger, while we all still had happy secure homes and lives in Brno. Oh, how distant and long ago that seemed to me, as I waited in the dismal, dark and noisy station with my label still around my neck. Suddenly I realized that I did not know the Pláček's' address in London and as I looked at the label, it only gave my name and Victoria Station, London. What if nobody came to claim me? Would I be able to find Mr. Karl Pláček who owned a department store on Masaryk Street in Brno? Whom would I ask ? I did have the Flixton, Manchester address of the Daniels family, but I knew I would have to take another train to reach them and there were so many trains at Victoria Station !

I suppose I need not have worried because, after what seemed like a long wait to me, I recognized one of the ladies from the International Red Cross from America, who had traveled on the train and boat with us and had even spoken a few words of peculiar sounding English to me. She had been kind and praised my English even though it was hard for me to understand hers. She had black

frizzy hair and a somewhat deep voice. She was walking toward where I was sitting hugging my backpack, accompanied by Mr. Pláček or Onkel Karl, as I had called him at home. He had been confused as to the time of our arrival and he whisked me away in a taxi to the family's London apartment. telling me that, as always, he was busy, and had to go back to work. He put me in the care of Andula, the children's nanny whom I remembered from home. I found myself wondering why I could not stay here in London, with the Pláčeks who were at least somewhat familiar, who spoke my language and, above all, who knew my parents.

Andula was a kind and comforting person. She took us to the park and we played on a roundabout, that you stand on and put in motion yourself. Several of us were riding on it and it was there that, having summed up all my courage, I said my first English sentence in England: "It's raining!" None of the children on the roundabout, Stephan and Vera included, seemed to notice this milestone in my life, but I never forgot it. I had even used the abbreviated form ' it's '! Andula took us home, their flat was not far from the park and allowed me to choose what I wanted for supper. I chose Eierspeiss (scrambled eggs) with toast, and that was the last time that anything tasted, felt or sounded remotely reminiscent of my childhood at home.

The next morning, by now it was August 3rd, I was taken, again by Mr. Pláček, to the station where he put me on the Manchester train, in charge of a kind, blonde lady, with three or four children. In retrospect I understand what an enormous amount of coordination and communication went into the organization

of my final arrival in Manchester where I was met by the Daniels family. It must have involved not only the Placeks and the Daniels family, but also Grace Beaton, who in her letter of July 23rd to my parents, mentions that she will arrange everything between Mr. and Mrs. Daniels and Mrs. Plaček (whom I don't remember seeing that afternoon and evening in London at all) , members of the Children's Committee and others. However, as Onkel Karl kissed me good- bye at the station that morning, and went no doubt, to send the second telegram informing my parents that I was on my way - the first had reported my safe arrival in London - I felt completely abandoned , forlorn and helplessly unhappy. I cried for most of the three or so hours of the train journey, but as the blonde lady told me that we were approaching Manchester, I tried to look forward to meeting my new little brother Harry, my new Auntie Edna and Uncle Harry. I was vaguely aware that my parents would have wanted me to try to smile.

My first impression was that of Auntie Edna. She had light blue eyes, brown hair and was wearing a beige coat with a big orange colored hat. As I was coming down the three or four steps from the train to the platform, she said "Renate ?" and I felt relief and surprise that they knew how to pronounce my name! At home, in Brno, everybody who could speak English had thought that they would think that my name was pronounced as if it rhymed with ' relate' . Uncle Harry , whose twinkling blue eyes and face that crinkled in a special way when he smiled, evoked immediate feelings of friendliness and security, came forward and, taking a reluctant little boy by the hand, said, " Come here, Danny, give Renate a kiss. Come and meet your big sister." Little Harry, (always called Danny or later Dan by his parents) promptly withdrew his hand and backed away. That first episode has since become a joke in our family. Harry insists that

his instinctive withdrawal at the sight of me was the result of accurate intuition! Harry and I became very close, we played well together, understood one another and shared secrets. I think we quarreled less than most biological brothers and sisters. Our relationship persisted into adulthood and continues to this day. Thus on that rainy afternoon in August of 1939, I met the family, with whom I was to spend the next seven years, the years of puberty and early adolescence.

BEGINNINGS IN ENGLAND

My parents did not return to Brno immediately after my departure from Prague. My mother could not face the empty apartment. They went to Luhacovice, one of the Moravian spas where we had previously spent several vacations together. This time my father did not “commute”, since, first of all, he was no longer working, and secondly, they could not bear to be apart. In his first letter to them, after my arrival, Uncle Harry described how, in the car, on the way from the station, Harry and I had made animal noises. We imitated dogs and cats and apparently soon found a common international language. Although I share that memory, my predominant impression was of the dismal rainy day outside and of trying to convey to Uncle Harry and Auntie Edna how at home I loved such rainy days because I liked to be cosy in my bath robe and slippers. So the word ‘cosy’ was among the first I learned that afternoon. My parents were of course desperate for a letter from me and Uncle Harry had written that, although he had asked me to write that first day, immediately, I had cried so much, that they had thought it best to allow me to wait for a day or two. This turned out to be a good idea, because my first and all subsequent letters were cheerful, happy and full of interesting descriptions of events around me. Never once did they convey the desperate feelings of homesickness, the yearning for a familiar face or sound, nor the longing that my nights, which were accompanied by dreams of home, my parents and friends (all very realistic and convincing) would never end.

Like most children in a similar situation, I instinctively assumed a new, grown-up responsibility, namely that of subconsciously protecting my parents from worrying about me. I described the trip, my new bedroom, with a doll named Betty, in a

crib that was waiting for me, I described Harry and our games and some of the food we ate. I wrote on the delightfully illustrated (by a Czech children's artist) note paper that had been one of my mother's presents, in cursive, in Czech. I addressed my parents 'moje nejdražší mamičko' and 'muj nejdražší tatíčku', an endearing diminutive only possible in Czech or German, that I had never used before. I suppose it is roughly translatable as 'my dearest little mummy and my dearest little daddy', although in English, it does not sound quite right.

Letter number 1 : *"You wrote to me that I would get your first letter after I arrived in Flixton. In the meantime, Auntie Edna gave it to me when they met me at the railway station. Harry is very cute and does not look at all like his picture. The trip was nice and we all slept like logs on the ship, in cabins. No, I wasn't cold during the Channel crossing, because I had on my cosy pyjamas and slept in a little bed. I also slept a little on the train. I didn't eat all my food and breakfast on the ship was so bad, they gave us tea with milk and no sugar !*

Letter number 2 : *"Yes, I've got my little angel necklace, my watch - it keeps very accurate time - and my bracelet. They did not search us at the border at all and my luggage is all right. They only asked me if I had any gold on me and I told them I did and they looked at it and said I could keep it. No, we don't have a telephone here, not do we have a Manya. Uncle Harry is trying hard to help to bring you out. They said you would be here in September or October. Thank you for the surprise. We have funny things to eat here".*

After the war, when my mother reminisced about my arrival in England, she always said how difficult it was for them to have no idea, no image of the

environment into which they had sent their child. Was the Daniels family wealthy? Were there servants, would we children be spoiled and treated like small aristocrats ? Would we be sent to one of those Spartan, yet famous British boarding schools, that everyone in Europe had read about? Or were they poor, could they afford another child ? Did they have a bathroom ? If, as they had informed us, they were an 'average Lancashire family' , what did that mean, how did an 'average Lancashire family' live ? As an adult, I now feel for all the gently probing questions in my parents' letters: was there a telephone, did they have a Manya or someone to help Auntie Edna with the household ? They were trying to create a context in which to place us.

Soon after I arrived in Flixton, perhaps even that first night, several young men came to visit , who spoke both Czech and German with me. The name of one of them was Bruno and for a short time, he and perhaps one or two others visited periodically. I looked forward to those visits. Later I learned that the young men, with several others, had all lived in a hostel somewhere not far from Flixton; all were Jewish or political refugees from Germany or Czechoslovakia. After the declaration of war, they were all considered suspicious and undesirable elements of society, each a potential spy for Germany , possibly representing grave danger for Britain. So Bruno and his friends, as well as other groups like them, were sent away, some to Australia, some to the Isle of Mann and elsewhere. It is now well known that among them were many distinguished scientists, artists, musicians, writers, all anti- Fascists, who having fled Nazi Germany, had sought refuge in England and were desperate to help in fighting the common enemy. Several of them were indeed eventually allowed to leave

the camps to which they had been exiled and many contributed significantly to the war effort.

The phenomenon was somewhat comparable to the forced exile, later, of individuals and families of Japanese origin in the United States. In Britain, where no one was prepared for war and initially, there was a real fear that the island would be invaded by the Germans, it was not possible, at the beginning, to overburden the bureaucratic machinery with careful investigations of thousands of individuals. The refugees were safe, and while their handling was unexpected and unfair for the majority, at the time, it was considered to be the best and the only temporary solution. I do not know if Dr. Nathan who had written to my parents, was among the exiled refugees, I am not aware of ever having met him or his family..

I soon found that the English I had learned in Brno was not going to be very helpful to me in Manchester, the heart of Lancashire, where their northern accent and way of pronouncing vowels was very difficult for me to understand. So for example 'black cat' was pronounced with an open 'a', as in 'ah', as opposed to an 'ae' as I had been taught, a 'book' had a long 'uu', not a short one and there were many other differences. I remember a morning when I felt nauseous. I didn't know how to say it, so I found Uncle Harry and I said, "I feel....., I feel.....?" He looked at me, and pressing his abdomen, he made as if to throw up, and said, "Is that how you feel? Do you feel sick?" I nodded enthusiastically and tucked away another useful word for the future. It seems that I learned quite quickly because Auntie Edna and Uncle Harry decided that I should go to school that fall into the third grade, taught by Miss Jeffs. Harry was going to school for

the first time, into first grade; we would go together. Miss Jeffs was young, pretty, and she had dark brown, curly hair, below her ears. That is about all I remember about the elementary school in Flixton, because we were not there for very long.

Letter number 3. *Dear Daddy and Mummy, They have funny things to eat here, for example a banana and then a drink of milk. Yesterday, I ate six bananas and I didn't even feel sick! Today Auntie Edna's sister came and we all went to visit somebody who had fish there. There is a big garden here. Did you get my letters? We are going to the seaside in a few days.* I am looking forward to that very much. Your Pipek. (Our kitty is helping me write this letter by walking all over the table and nudging my hand).*

* The family had deferred their summer vacation until after my arrival. It never materialized however, because war was declared.

During my first month with the Daniels family, I met many of Harry's relatives. There was Grandma Daniels a kind, comfortable, old - to us - lady who loved to kiss and hug. She was Uncle Harry's mother, a widow from World War One. Her husband had been killed in battle, and little Harry's middle name, Hewitt, was in his memory. At fourteen, his son Harry, had had to take care of two younger sisters, Doris and Amy. Their mother worked, Harry cooked, took the girls to school, fed them and helped his mother. I think he left school at that age, and started to work also. He was a very bright, 'self- made man', with lots of (later) evening courses. He read voraciously and became a critical thinker. It was my impression that it was his ability to think independently that resulted in his joining

the Quakers, becoming a Member of the Friends, and in turn a conscientious objector, who refused to bear arms for any reason. He was an engineer and worked for the Shell Oil Company. He had served overseas in what was then known as Persia (now Iran) had a great deal of general knowledge and many interests. His two sisters, Auntie Doris, married to Uncle Arthur and Auntie Amy, married to Uncle Stafford, all lived in Manchester also. Auntie Amy and Uncle Stafford had just had a new baby, Patricia, born on February 28th 1939, whom we visited and admired, and who, together with her mother later lived with us during the war, when Uncle Stafford joined the Royal Navy. Pat is now a great grandmother. Then there was Grandma Leeming, Auntie Edna's stepmother. Her own mother had died after World War I of what was said to have been 'sleepy sickness' and Grandpa Leeming (like my grandfather Alois Jokl) had remarried. So Harry and I each had one real, paternal, grandmother and our maternal grandmothers were both from second marriages. Auntie Edna was also one of three, she had an elder sister Doris, who never married and lived with her stepmother, Grandma Leeming, in Middleton, another suburb of Manchester, a brother Arthur, married to Auntie Harriet. They had three sons and a daughter, Harry's cousins, all older than we, of whom we subsequently saw a great deal. Grandma Leeming had a sister, Auntie Miriam, who also lived with her and was an invalid. She walked on crutches, sat on a chair by the fire and told the most remarkable stories to us children. In retrospect, I have often wondered if she had cerebral palsy, perhaps the result of a birth trauma. Her mind was utterly alert and unaffected. Then there was Auntie Nellie, a cousin of Uncle Harry's to whom I was drawn immediately, perhaps because she had the same name as my mother. She was intelligent, understood me, bought me books and we became close and had fun together. I once spent a wonderful Christmas holiday

at her house. She was a podiatrist (then called a chiropodist). She never married. There were of course other members of the family, but the ones mentioned here were the closest and the ones whom we saw and with whom we periodically spent time. I tried to describe the whole family in my letters to my parents . The extended Daniels family accepted me unconditionally and took me to heart. We were never mentioned otherwise than ' the children' , each time Harry received a present from one of his grandmas, aunts or uncles, I received one too. Everything was meticulously equal or divided into two parts. Apart from one exception, I never felt like an intruder or an outsider, nor was I ever made to feel like one.

Although I was not aware of it, a little refugee girl from occupied Europe, was probably quite a sensation and something people talked about. Perhaps, not to be left out, one of the Daniels' neighbors in Flixton, who lived two houses away, also took a little girl into their home. Their names were Bob and Betty Rawlinson and they had a lovely, blond, blue-eyed little two year old daughter, Janet, with whom Harry sometimes played . The little refugee girl's name was Ruth, she was three years old, Jewish and she came from Germany. She had blond, angelic curls, huge blue - gray eyes and she spent most of her time talking in German, 'jabbering' the Rawlinsons called it, on a toy telephone to her 'Mutti' in Germany. I was the only one who understood that she was constantly calling her 'Mutti' and her 'Vati' to come and take her home. "Bitte, bitte kommt schon!" I never saw Ruth cry and I tried to play with her whenever I could. By and by, I heard that Ruth had been sent away, she did not 'fit in'. She had apparently been 'nosy', had walked around the house, opening all the drawers and looking into them. "After all", was the conclusion I heard, she was "a foreigner and

foreigners are all so different !” I often thought of Ruth and wonder to this day (she would be 63 years old now) what happened to that sweet homesick little three year old who was found unacceptable by an English family, because she was a “ nosy little foreigner” who “jabbered away” in a language that they could not understand. Did she survive the war, was she ever reunited with her “Mutti und Vati” whom she missed so much?

In fairness to the Rawlinsons, I should add that, although I have few memories of Betty (she had dark hair and dark eyes) Bob was friendly and he, Uncle Harry, little Harry and I frequently had fun playing cricket on the lawn, in the Daniels back garden. During the war, we (at least I) lost sight of them.

Letter number 4. *Dearest Mummy, How many of my letters have you received? I am writing my seventh. Harry and I understand each other well , only I don't play with him much, he isn't interested in girls, only boys and boys. I sleep alone, far away from little Harry, in my own room. I sleep there and am there the whole day. Dressing myself is fine, today I am wearing my little sailor dress, a pinafore, with slippers and no stockings. I enjoyed the book you sent very much. I read it all immediately and now am reading it for the one and a halfth time and Uncle Harry didn't have to pay anything for it. I always say my prayers at night. No one has written to me yet, I am keeping all my letters too. My dolly's name is Betty. We went swimming yesterday, but not outside. I go swimming often, just like in Brno to the Central Swimming Pool. I have my little angel, bracelet and my watch. I got a telephone from Harry and a coloring book, but I don't have any crayons. Our cat is called Billy. Trillions and millions and another trillion kisses*

*from, Guess whom? I can't write to anybody else, because I'm very tired.
Please, please write to me.*

I had been with the Daniels family for exactly one month when, on Sunday, September 3rd, 1939, Hitler invaded Poland and Great Britain declared war on Germany. The fear of bombing of large British cities, as well as of a German invasion of Britain, resulted in Uncle Harry's decision, sometime in mid-September, to send Auntie Edna, Harry and me to the country, to safety. We traveled by car, to the charming village of Yealand Conyers in Cumberland, not far from the lovely Lake District. There was a huge (or so it seemed to me) mansion in its own grounds. The Manor, as it was generally called, belonged to the Friends and it had been converted into a boarding school, run by them for children who were evacuees or refugees. There was a difference between 'evacuees', British children sent to the country for safety from London, Manchester and other big cities, and 'refugees', who were foreigners (a bad word) mostly from Hitler occupied Europe. I would have given anything to be an 'evacuee' and not a 'refugee' and I wished fervently that my status would change.

We arrived in Yealand late one Sunday evening and the Manor grounds were full of bunnies whose little white tails were bobbing in and out of the darkening bushes. Suddenly I realized that Uncle Harry and Auntie Edna intended to leave us there, alone, at The Manor, in the care of the Misses Jones, two white haired, unmarried sisters, who were in charge of all the children. In retrospect, I have no doubt that we would have been safe, happy and well cared for. At the time

however, I could not face yet another separation. In vain did Uncle Harry take me by the hand for a walk in the grounds and point out the bunnies, the frogs in the ponds and try to convince me, how I would learn to like it there. I cried so bitterly and pleaded so fervently, that he finally decided to find lodgings in the village for Auntie Edna, Harry and me, so that we could stay together. Uncle Harry would go back to Manchester and visit on weekends.

So it was, that we three stayed in the home of Auntie Alice Boffey, her husband Uncle Frank, their two daughters Irene (Reenie) and Margaret, and step-daughter Marion who was hearing impaired. They, too, were Quakers and Auntie Alice played the organ beautifully at the Friends' Meeting House across the street from where they (and now we) lived. That house, called Laurel Bank was built of stone, it was old and overgrown with ivy and laurel (hence the name) and like the rest of the village, it was utterly charming. Once we felt at home there, Harry and I invented the following rhyme. I see us both standing on Auntie Alice's dining chairs, jumping up and down and yelling at the top of our voices: "Boffey Frank, Laurel Bank, Yealand Conyers, Carnforth!" (There was something compelling about the rhyme and the rhythm that made us want to repeat it over and over.) We loved Auntie Alice - everyone did. I didn't know it at the time, but the house was full of genuine antiques, lovely old furniture, Auntie Alice collected old clocks and she had, not only a piano, which I was allowed to play, but also two real organs, with pedals! I never did find out, even as an adult, who Auntie Alice really was, what her background, her education or her family. As a child, I was instinctively aware that she was an unusually gentle, kind, sensitive, yet down to earth person, who worked hard, helped others, loved children and was utterly non-judgmental. She took me for granted and treated me just like all the

others. She didn't seem to mind (or even notice) that I was a refugee and a foreigner, she appeared to have forgotten that I did not belong to the family and she certainly did not care.

Yealand was nestled in the beautiful hills of Cumberland, that surrounded the Lake District. As is characteristic for so many English and Scottish villages, it was inhabited by many intellectuals who lived in large lovely old houses with gardens in which there were roses everywhere, many over one hundred years old. One such house, next door to Auntie Alice's belonged to the family of Percy and Elfrida Vipont Foulds. Elfrida was a well known author of children's books. They had four children all girls. Robin was the oldest, about sixteen at the time, Carol, at about thirteen, was taller than Robin and had the darkest hair, Dody (Dorothy) was about my age and Annie, the baby, was about four. I never saw much of Mr. Foulds, but Elfrida was a typical English intellectual. She was small and trim, always wore tweeds and flat shoes; she had short dark hair, a deep voice and she told the most wonderful nature stories. She taught at the Manor, where Harry and I became day pupils. Auntie Alice's house was on the main road, just at the bottom of a long winding drive which led to the Manor. Every day Harry and I walked along that drive to and from school and I remember many important conversations. That drive saw the beginnings of our deep friendship. The drive was separated from the road by a large gate, inside of which was a cottage. I assume that it had housed a head gardener and his family, who, in the past perhaps had taken care of the Manor grounds. Once the Manor became a school, the cottage housed several different tenants, sometimes they taught at the school, others fulfilled other village functions. For some reason, Elfrida took a liking to me and would invite me to join her and her girls for walks. She was kind,

and she, too, took me for granted and I owe her some of the first truly peaceful and happy moments of my English childhood. I was very proud to be able to introduce my own two children to Elfrida, when as an adult, during a visit to England, long after the war, the three of us spent a day in Yealand with Auntie Alice.

The children in Yealand were a mixed group. There was Lorelinde from Germany who hated me because I was 'Czech'. She was a little older, perhaps twelve, an exceptionally beautiful child with auburn braids and large hazel colored eyes. Auntie Edna, who helped take care of the children, would talk about how she and the other women loved to brush and braid Lorelinde's hair. She was hostile toward me because, as she maintained, the Czechs were enemies of the Germans, so there was no way that she could treat me as a friend, even as a fellow refugee in a similar situation to her own. She forgot that we were both Jewish.

Then there was Akim, a tall, thin dark haired boy of twelve, with a sallow complexion. He lived at the Manor House with his mother; they had fled from Poland and his mother helped in the kitchens. One day when my golden fountain pen, a gift from my father, had been missing for about a week, they found it among his possessions. He had attempted to scratch out my name which had been engraved on the cover. When he was asked why he had taken it, Akim replied that he too hated the Czechs. If the Czechs hadn't surrendered to Hitler and given up their land, then Hitler would never have invaded Poland. There would have been no war, and he, Akim, and his mother could have stayed at

home and would not have had to live here in a strange country among all these strange people!

We stayed in Yealand for almost a year and I think about it with nostalgia. The winter of 1939 - 1940 was said to have been one of the most severe in years and up there in the north of England, it was particularly cold. The Boffey girls who were in their late teens, took me ice skating on the frozen lakes and our walks and games in the snow were exhilarating and lots of fun. The countryside was spectacularly beautiful and although I kept thinking about my parents and convincing myself and Harry on our walks to and from school, that I could never have a 'happy childhood' which was the title of the Czech book that my parents had sent me, I slowly began to get accustomed to life with the Daniels family, to going to school, the sound of the language, and everything around me. Little Harry listened attentively to my musings, although I don't know how much he understood.

My first English Christmas occurred in Yealand and it was memorable. On Christmas Eve, after dusk, we children spent what seemed like hours at the huge picture windows of the Manor House, waiting for the twinkling lights of Father Christmas's (the British Santa Claus) sled with his reindeer, as they flew along the snowy crest of distant Ingleborough. There was a huge Christmas tree and there were presents for everyone. Prior to Christmas Eve, a concert had been organized by the Manor House school teachers in which we all participated. It was, appropriately, an international Christmas and each child sang or danced. Harry was a little French boy, with a red beret on his blond hair and I was a Spanish girl, in a colorful costume. We sang "On the twenty fifth of December,

tra la la", and banged tambourines. I cannot help but feel gratitude to the staff and organizers of the school who did so much, worked so hard and so sensitively, to bring joy to the children under their care, many without parents and lonelier than I.

Uncle Harry, to whom I had become very attached and whom I sought in every blue eyed father with a crinkly smile, who happened to visit the Manor, came for Christmas of course. In the Daniels family (and many others) Father Christmas, like Santa Claus came down the chimney , during the night. Harry and I woke up very early on Christmas morning and spent a few anxious moments looking around our bedrooms, finding nothing. I think it was Uncle Harry who suggested that perhaps ' the old man' had been in such a hurry that he didn't have enough time to come inside, perhaps he had left something outside the door. Sure enough, as we peeked outside the bedroom door, there was a huge white pillowcase for each of us, full of presents. How relieved and excited we were ! There were presents from everyone. Grandma Daniels, Grandma and Grandpa Leeming, he was still alive at the time, aunts, uncles, cousins on both sides of the family, friends. Everyone who sent a present for Harry, sent one for me too. The whole family had accepted me as their own and everything came in two's. Their love and scrupulous fairness was touching. After all, some of them hardly knew me and I certainly did not know all of them. However, as far as they were concerned, Harry and Edna now had a little girl and that was all that mattered. Harry and I counted all our presents and found that we had thirty three each!!

I was still writing to my parents at that time and remember that I was gradually beginning to forget Czech words. The first one I forgot was the word for candle,

so, as I was describing the party we had had and the big tree with hundreds of candles in the Manor House hall, I substituted the Czech word 'svíčka' with the English 'candle'. In her next letter, my mother wrote the word down for me and, interestingly, together with 'yes, no, please and thank you', the word 'svíčka' became one of the only five or six words of Czech that I remembered seven years later. Since I had no occasion whatsoever to speak Czech or German for all that time, I had completely forgotten both languages when I returned home in 1946. I understood absolutely nothing. It is interesting to read the Czech letters. They were still detailed, informative and full of little items that would have interested my parents. However, the Czech was becoming stilted and clumsy, almost as if I were translating from English into Czech. In the meantime, my English was improving to such an extent, that, by Christmas, it probably differed little from that of an English child my age.

One more story is perhaps in order at this stage of the narrative, because, although we did not find out about it, until after the war was over, it began in 1940. Furthermore, its protagonists played an important role in my parents' lives at the beginning of the war.

In the summer of 1945, (the war had ended in Europe in May of that year) a package arrived from Denmark, addressed to Harry and me. In it, was a tiny teddy bear (about 4 inches long) for me, a similar little toy for Harry, and a pair of warm felt slippers for each of us, embroidered in color (mine red, Harry's blue) in characteristic Czech style. The only problem was, that both pairs of slippers were many sizes too small. With the package came a letter from a Mr. Hagbaard Jonassen from Copenhagen, informing us that the package had arrived

sometime in 1940, via the European resistance network. Denmark, which had been occupied in April of that year, could no longer participate in the clandestine transmission of mail which previously had been relayed from occupied through unoccupied countries in Europe to Britain. The network later involved the United States also. Initially I had received my parents' letters through France, after the fall of France, through Holland, and finally through Denmark. (Neutral Switzerland refused to transmit mail). The package from my parents for Harry and me, had arrived in Denmark just prior to its occupation by Hitler, so Mr. Jonassen could no longer forward it on to England. He wrote that he and his family had decided to keep the package for as long as possible. Ultimately, they had it for five years so that, if it should turn out to be the last communication from my parents, I could still receive it. He was referring to the strong possibility that perhaps my parents would not survive the war, and as he wrote, in 1945, he did not know if they had. The little teddy bear traveled with me, everywhere I went, for some thirty years, until he finally had to retire to 'teddy-bear heaven'. The unforgettable issue that will remain with me forever, is the goodness of this complete stranger, Mr. Hagbaard Jonassen, who had the kindness, foresight and sensitivity to want to save what could easily have been a final loving message, from her parents, to a little girl, whom he did not know and had no plans ever to meet.

We subsequently learned that Mr. Jonassen was also a member of War Resisters International and risked his life under Hitler, initially by forwarding mail through occupied countries and later, with many others, in the resistance movement itself. In Denmark, he led a movement called "Aldrig Mere Krig" (No more war) and participated in the publication of its monthly newspaper. Many of

the movement's volunteers for relief work were trained and equipped in the far north of Norway.

The impressions, feelings and smells of that year in Yealand have never left me. The large herds of sheep grazing in fields, separated by stone walls, the stiles we would climb through, the rolling, bracken covered hills, are so firmly entrenched in my memory, that whenever I experience a sensation that is remotely reminiscent of those months, the whole image is recreated and I feel nostalgic for the unique beauty of that part of the world. I want to go back and inhale it, I want to know if it affects me as an adult, in the same way that it affected me as a child.

While we were in Yealand, an event occurred that must have been unspeakably terrifying for my parents. It concerned Harry and me and although I was vaguely aware of the discussions surrounding it, (I don't think Harry was) I had no idea of the effect it could have had upon my parents; in fact, I hardly thought about it. In the summer of 1939, the Pláček family who had emigrated from Brno to London, decided to move to Canada to greater safety. They had booked passage on the RMS (Royal Mail Service) Athenia, one of the large ocean liners, which were the common means of transatlantic passenger transportation at the time. She flew the British flag under Cunard White Star. Karl Pláček had contacted Uncle Harry, offering to take Harry and me with their family, away from Europe. Uncle Harry immediately consulted my parents, who responded, as they had previously, when questioned about the issue of my religious education, that I was now wholly in their care, and they trusted Uncle Harry to make the decisions he considered to be right for both Harry and me. So the decision was

made that Harry and I would accompany the Pláček^v to Canada. I remember Uncle Harry mentioning this to me, asking me about it, but I do not recall details. I know nothing of the painful discussions that must have taken place between him, Auntie Edna and, I assume, other family members. The date on which the Athenia was to embark upon her voyage, from Liverpool, was September 1st 1939. My parents were notified. Britain was still at peace on that day and, according to the rules of war (a contradiction in terms if ever there was one) a ship that leaves port during times of peace, cannot be attacked. The Athenia left Liverpool during a time of peace. Although this information was communicated in a reassuring manner by the captain of the Athenia to her passengers, the captain insisted on two consecutive lifeboat drills in which all on board were ordered to participate. On the third day of her voyage, on September 3rd 1939, on the day that Britain declared war on Nazi Germany, The Athenia was struck by a German torpedo and sunk in the middle of the North Atlantic. Some four hundred passengers and crew lost their lives on that, the first day of World War Two. An approximately equal number survived, the Pláček^v Family among them. Their belongings were lost but they owed their lives to the fortuitously adventurous spirit of two little boys. Steven, their son, who communicated his memories personally to me, was nine years old at the time. He and his slightly older cousin Jack had participated with glee in the lifeboat drills ordered by the captain. They had also explored the boat and run up and down its narrow passageways on and below deck. As a result, the boys were aware of a quicker and shorter route from the dining room, where they happened to be when the torpedo struck, to the lifeboat decks. They ran, urging their parents and five year old sister Elizabeth to follow them, while loudspeakers were directing the other passengers in a more organized fashion. Thus they were among the first to

reach the lifeboats. Women and children were lowered first, but since there were insufficient oarsmen for the boats, Karl volunteered to row. They returned once to the listing ship to rescue at least some occupants from another of the lifeboats which had capsized. After many hours on the open sea, having watched the Athenia as she gradually disappeared, they were rescued by the crew of a British destroyer, the HMS Electra. Four years later, in 1943, she herself was torpedoed by the Japanese navy, in the Java Sea. At the time of this writing, Steven Placek, now 70 years old, is one of only three currently living survivors of the RMS Athenia. The images and experience of that night of September 3rd 1939 have remained with him as the most significant in his life.

My father was listening to the radio in our apartment in Brno, together with some friends, when he heard the news of the sinking of the Athenia. My mother was not at home at the time. As she came in, she apparently knew, from the faces of those confronting her that something terrible had happened. They knew that there were some survivors, what they did not know, was that the decision to send Harry and me had been reversed in the last minute. That is the essence of my information. How they survived the next hours, days, before they heard that we were safe, I cannot begin to imagine. I assume that Hitler's increasing restrictions and harassment of Jews paled in comparison.

Toward the end of my first school year in England, Shell United Kingdom (Shell UK for short) the big oil refinery for which Uncle Harry worked, was moved in its entirety to Morecambe, or rather Heysham which was contiguous with Morecambe, a seaside resort on the Atlantic, on the northwest coast of England. It was some fifteen miles south of Yealand and some ten miles south of the Lake

District. For some reason , the location was considered to be safer than the one previously occupied by this huge plant, and, indeed it was, because, although there was intensive bombing by the German Luftwaffe across the Bay from Morecambe , of an area called Barrow-in-Furness, M orecambe and Heysham received only a single bomb throughout the duration of the war. Incidentally, that single bomb did not even explode, it formed a big crater, which became a tourist attraction ! Uncle Harry and Auntie Edna bought a bungalow in Morecambe and, in late spring, we (as well as Shell UK) moved there. The bungalow's name was "Wayside", its address 1, Norton Place, Morecambe, Lancashire. It was at the beginning of a cul – de – sac, three or four blocs from the beach and the crashing waves of the Atlantic. It was a pleasant area for children to grow in. We were to stay there for the duration of the war and beyond. I finished third grade in Morecambe at Sandylands Elementary School which both Harry and I attended. The teaching at Yealand, which had been by necessity, almost on a one to one basis, since the children were all of different ages and at various stages of their education, must have been excellent. I had received beginnings of French from a Miss Hunter, good English composition writing from Miss Jones, and I was well prepared to continue in the main stream of the conclusion of a regular third grade, with my peers. My teacher was Miss Lorna Tennant and Miss Wilding subsequently taught me in fourth grade. In March of fourth grade, I was sent to take a scholarship exam to the local Grammar School. This must have been a big event in my life, because not only do I remember what I wore, my first scotch kilt (red tartan) and a white blouse, but I even remember some of the questions. It was a written test, in several parts, with short answers, in. maths, English, general knowledge and some 'science'. I certainly do not recall any nervousness or feeling of responsibility to do well. In fact, I don't think I was aware as to why I

was taking this exam at all. I was told to appear at a certain place, answered the questions and was taken home again. It turned out that I won a scholarship and was able to enter Morecambe Grammar School (one of perhaps the four or five best Grammar Schools in the country) at the beginning of the next school year. In other words I skipped fifth grade, missed decimal points and entered the first form, called One Alpha in the autumn of 1941, aged ten.

At Sandylands, the Headmaster, Mr. William Braithwaite, whom I liked immediately, because his somewhat elongated face, with vertical skin folds and glasses, reminded me of my father, took me under his wing. He was a sweet, gentle man who loved old books and allowed me to help in the library. He told wonderful stories about the classics. On the other hand, he possessed a booming, sonorous voice which evoked fear in misbehaving boys, whom he always called by their surnames, and in all of us at morning assembly in the school hall, when he called out multiplication problems, followed by the name of the hapless victim who had to answer, immediately, accurately and in front of the whole school. We had to memorize multiplication tables up to twelve and, according to Mr. Braithwaite, we had to know the answers if we were awakened in the middle of the night. I cannot help but comment that this has stood me in good stead for the rest of my life and I doubt that modern math, with all its new teaching methodology, has superseded memorization of the multiplication tables

Mr. Braithwaite and his wife would occasionally invite me to tea at their home which overlooked the cliffs and the sea. I always looked forward to those afternoons in that musty old house full of books with its peculiar smells. They continued to invite me even after I left Sandylands and attended Morecambe

Grammar School. Gradually, his wife died and his daughter, Ruth, moved away. When I visited years later, as an adult, I realized that the exalted, idolized headmaster of Sandylands, like so many others, had become an impoverished, lonely, neglected, elderly man, still gentle, who desperately craved company or someone with whom he could nostalgically discuss the classics that his failing eyesight no longer permitted him to read.

WHAT IS RENATE?

By the time I entered Morecambe Grammar School, correspondence with my parents had all but ended. We were allowed 25 word letter telegrams, issued and transmitted through the International Red Cross. The 25 words were supposed to include the address, so little was left for communication. We were permitted to exchange such lettergrams perhaps four times per year and through them, we in England learned that, initially my parents still lived in our apartment in Brno, but together with four additional families, one in each room. The Nazis had designated two or three streets in Brno and other cities, as ghettos, permitting one room per family. Our apartment, as was mentioned previously, happened to be in one of the designated streets. The families shared the bathroom and kitchen and took turns cooking (two hours per family). It is unclear what they cooked, since Jews were not allowed to shop in regular stores during regular hours. Some were brave and risked going out, hoping they would not be recognized. That was before they were forced to wear yellow stars on their outer clothes. If they were recognized, they were frequently rounded up by the Gestapo, never to come home again. There were many non Jewish friends who came secretly to the ghettos and brought food, Manya among them. All were true heroes and heroines who risked their homes, their work, their lives and those of their loved ones to help the innocent occupants of the ghettos. No words exist that can express the magnitude of the courage, the integrity of these ordinary people, former neighbors, friends acquaintances who saved so many lives.

Two or three of the families in our apartment had children, among them Lola and Leo Wasserberger , with Gerda. After the war my mother often described her unbearable sadness and feelings of doubt about her decision to send me away, when she watched and listened to the children playing together. Yes, they were hungry, yes they were cramped, unable to go to school or play outside. They were leading completely abnormal and unhealthy lives, but they were alive, they were there and they were together! It is possible that her decision was reaffirmed, once deportations began to concentration camps, but even then no one knew their true ultimate destination. It was probably not until the war was over that the grim realization that none of my peers had survived, permitted my mother to acknowledge that her decision had saved not only my life, but possibly hers too.

So through the 25 word lettergrams, we knew that sometime during 1941, my parents had moved to Slovakia to live with my father's family. "Moved to Grandma. Are healthy and happy" said the telegram. Slovakia was still a 'free', independent ally of The Third Reich, and remained so until 1944, when the Slovak National Rebellion took place. How my parents arrived there and why, we did not know. And between 1942 and 1945, we heard absolutely nothing, even though I, as well as members of the international network, which included not only Mr. Hagbaard Jonassen in Denmark, but also a Mr. Gosta Bohm in Sweden, continued to write the periodic twenty five word communications about my progress at school, sometimes adding that " Renate and Harry were healthy and well." These kind and dedicated individuals never knew whether their brief messages reached their destination or not. Some did and, during her 1975 interview with Ruth Davis, my mother recalled with tears of gratitude, how

she and my father always responded with the same words. Dear Mr. Bohm, We thank you very much. We are happy as well and are sending our love." Then Sweden ceased all communication and toward the end of summer 1941, yet another letter arrived, this time from a Mrs. Eleanor Burns, Fifth Avenue, New York. The words again were the same, although of course to my parents, they meant everything. "Dear Mr. Mrs. Polgar, Renate is doing well at school. She and Harry are happy." Again my parents responded with the identical 'silly' (my mother called them 'dumm' in German) few words.

On the morning of September 10th 1941, it was my mother's turn to cook in the kitchen from 10 to 12 noon. It was a pleasant, early fall day and Miki had gone out on an errand. He came back unexpectedly, with a strange man. As he walked into the kitchen, he said, "Mutti, don't be afraid. This gentleman is from police headquarters and he needs to check our documents." My mother was not immediately worried, even though she saw that Miki was pale and his facial expression was grim. Their conscience was clear, she later recalled, and she offered to produce all documents there and then. Given their circumstances at the time, which differed little from those of any other Jewish couple or family in Brno, the request for documents was not so unexpected. My father had been born in Kežmarok, in what was now a 'free' German friendly country, and my parents, as 'foreign nationals', had been required to register with the Gestapo every three months and pay a laughable sum of money, three marks, as proof of permission to reside in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The plain clothes policeman who had accompanied my father home, told my parents to take the residence permit as well as the receipt for three marks, and to accompany him to the police station. It was a rather cool day and Nelly was

wearing a suit. Its jacket happened to be hanging in the hall and, as they passed it on their way out, she took it. My father was wearing an ordinary suit with a handkerchief in the top pocket. In the kitchen, the potatoes were almost boiling and my mother called to Lola Wasserberger asking her to turn them off when they were done. They would be home in half an hour or so. Lola reassured her, telling her not to worry. They came back four years later, on May 13th, 1945 .

They were taken to Gestapo headquarters, located in the building of the law school of the Brno University. In every occupied country, the Gestapo always selected the most beautiful and most luxurious locations for their purposes. On the way, in an official looking car, my mother tried to ask their messenger where they were going and why. He was a Czech and responded that he had no idea, he had only received orders to bring them in.

At the time, my mother was still somewhat weak, recovering from a hysterectomy which she had undergone just ten days previously. For several months she had had excessive bleeding which had culminated in a continuous hemorrhage of two to three weeks duration. Ilse, her cousin, had urged her to see a gynecologist, although of course Jews were not allowed to see doctors, nor were physicians allowed to treat Jewish patients. Dr. Bocek, (pronounced Bochek) a well known gynecologist in Brno, saw my mother one afternoon and, in no uncertain terms, told her to report to the hospital first thing next morning; he was going to operate. As she did not want this kind man to jeopardize his practice, or, worse, risk his life for her, my mother decided to tell him the truth about herself, that she was Jewish and could not be hospitalized. "Did I ask you?" he demanded, "I do not care who or what you are, you are a patient and you need

help! And don't be late for your admission tomorrow !" We don't know to this day, whether the nurses or the operating room staff knew the truth about their patient (she did not look very Jewish); the fact remains that this physician, as well as perhaps his staff, chose once more - to risk their careers, their lives and those of their families, to save the life of one patient! I wonder if that is what Hippokrates had in mind as he wrote the oath that bears his name to this day. I would like to think so. Nelly was in the hospital briefly, for three or four days, with Ilse at her side day and night. What courage! There is no doubt that she would have bled to death from the fibromyomas (benign tumors of the uterine wall) that were found in her uterus, had they not been removed.

On the third floor of Gestapo headquarters, another individual was sitting in an office with a pile of documents on the desk in front of him. "What is your name?" "Polgar" said my father, "Nelly Polgar" said my mother. "And Renate Polgar ?" "She is not here," answered my mother. "I see that," said the official rather angrily. "And where is she?" My parents responded that she had officially left the country with a Kindertransport in 1939. "Then that will make my work much easier." He left the room, but a few minutes later a Gestapo officer appeared, showing my father an official looking document, stating that he was being arrested for antifascist activities. In contrast to the previous occupant of the office, who spoke Czech and was not exactly hostile, the Gestapo person spoke only German, was contemptuous and officious. A third (or fourth) person was summoned to take my parents away, commenting sarcastically that they were obviously not accustomed to being arrested, since they were not prepared to be separated. Did they think there were luxury accommodations for husbands and wives? They kissed one another and, like thousands before them and millions

afterwards, they were convinced that this was a mistake, perhaps an administrative error had occurred somewhere; they would be allowed to go home within an hour or two, just as soon as the error was discovered and explained. They were taken downstairs to the cellars of the building. Their clothes, money watches etc. were all taken away and each was thrown into a cell, my mother with three other women. They were interrogated separately. First they asked my mother whether she knew why she was there. She did not. Using the methods that the Nazis had learnt and perfected from the Russians, they screamed: "We know everything from your husband !" at my mother, "...from your wife!" at my father. It was not until two or three days after they had been arrested, that my mother finally found out that this was no administrative misunderstanding or mistaken identity. They were accused of being members of an international spy ring, for which 'Renate' was the code word. They had committed treason against the Third Reich and that was punishable only by death. They were interrogated daily, sometimes more than once, and each time they were told that the other had confessed everything, so all they had to do was provide the details about their collaborators, and they would be freed. The 'collaborators' were named Hagbaard Jonassen from Denmark, Eleanor Burns from the United States and Gosta Bohm from Sweden. During each interrogation, they waved one of the Red Cross lettergrams in front of their faces, demanding to know the interpretation of the code word 'Renate', as well as the meaning of the phrases 'doing well at school' and 'we are also happy'. My mother was not beaten, but the interrogations were always conducted with her face to the wall, while the interrogator screamed at her. The Gestapo was always armed and she never knew when they might shoot her in the back. My father never spoke about his own ordeal during that time. Nelly later recalled that occasionally her fear during

the interrogation was superseded by a desperate desire to snatch the lettergram away from them – they had not heard from me for such a long time. Both she and my father of course maintained that 'Renate' was their daughter's name, that she was in England, there was no code, no spy ring, no espionage. It is unclear whether anyone believed them or not.

During her period in the prison cell, my mother thought with even more profound gratitude about Dr. Bocek. Had he not performed her operation, just ten days prior to her arrest, or had she visited him later, she would surely have bled to death in jail. As it was, she became weaker, but she survived. Despite the cruel treatment, neither she nor Miki changed their story about 'Renate'.

Nelly shared the cell with three other women. During her first night, a young girl, a student, Marianne Blum, was thrown into the cell around midnight. She had written and distributed antifascist leaflets. She lived with her widowed mother in the basement of their apartment building. Her mother had left the door open, as she went to collect the laundry and at that moment two Gestapo officers walked by and saw Marianne printing her leaflets. She was immediately arrested and was not even allowed to notify her mother. "Your mother will see that you are not here", they commented. Marianne was sentenced to death and shot soon after her arrest. She was nineteen or twenty years old. (My mother inquired about her after the war and that is what she learned.) She cried as she talked about her. The second inmate was a Mrs. Tonchi Schuller. As they became acquainted, Mrs. Schuller could not believe that my mother initially did not know why she had been arrested. Mrs. Schuller thought my mother did not trust her with the information. She herself had committed the crime of 'Rassenschande'.

She had had a relationship with an Aryan man. She survived the war and my mother even met and spoke to her in Israel some twenty years later. The third was a young woman named Rozhi. She had Hungarian citizenship and had been previously shipped from prison back to Hungary, as an 'undesirable element', Hungarian authorities had shipped her back, maintaining that she had spent ten years in Czechoslovakia and was no longer welcome in Hungary. So she had traveled back and forth three times from prison to prison. She told her cell-mates that she was a prostitute. She laughed, tried to cheer up her three cell-mates and took life at face value. My mother liked her. She slept with the prison guards and, with great glee and absolute generosity, shared all her 'payments' as well as any extra food, cigarettes, even little squares of chocolate with the other three. My mother didn't smoke, so she was able to exchange some of Rozhi's cigarette gifts for a pair of underwear. Rozhi too, was murdered, somewhere in a concentration camp.

Three weeks after they had been arrested, my parents were reunited for the first time, at what they thought would be yet another interrogation. The Obersturmfuhrer, a high ranking member of the Gestapo, announced that in spite of the espionage and treason that they had committed against the Third Reich, they were to be detained no longer. Instead, as 'foreigners' and citizens of Slovakia, they were to be punished by expulsion from the protection of the Third Reich, to be exiled to their native country. Miki of course was a Slovakian native and Nelly, as his wife automatically assumed her husband's country of origin and citizenship. They were to be taken to the railway station and deported to the border of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. As they were leaving, the Obersturmfuhrer's parting threat rang in their ears: "You have not heard the last

of 'Renate' !" For the first and only time in their lives, my parents hoped fervently, that a member of the Gestapo was right!

Three prisoners were taken to the Brno railway station. In addition to my parents, there was a Mr. Deutsch, about whom I have no other information, apart from the fact, that, he too, was a Slovakian national, a Jew, who was also being punished by expulsion from the Protectorate.

It is unclear what exactly happened at the station. My Aunt Ilse, now at the time of writing, 95 years old, with a brilliantly intact memory, tells me that she, Mitzi and perhaps other friends or family, were at the station, when my parents left. My mother does not mention that in her interview. If they were, and I have no reason to doubt Ilse's memories, they were probably allowed no contact, because, had they had an opportunity to communicate, I am convinced that Mitzi, as well as Ilse, would have found a way to smuggle money, jewelry or something else to them, during a handshake, an embrace or whatever. Perhaps they saw one another without overt signs of recognition. Be that as it may, they were accompanied in the train by the Gestapo and, upon arrival in Hodonin, a town near the border, they were handed over to Gendarmes (a kind of police) and taken again by car to the local Gestapo headquarters.

They found themselves in a villa, which my mother describes resembled a castle, surrounded by spectacular grounds and parks. It was Saturday noon, the official in charge was another high ranking Gestapo officer and the radio was blaring obnoxious Nazi military songs. My mother was feeling very weak as she and the two men (my father and Mr. Deutsch) stood there for what seemed a long time. Suddenly the officer looked up from the desk and barked angrily: "It is Saturday

afternoon, I am finishing here and locking up. I want these people back here on Monday!" The two men turned to leave, but my mother spoke up: "Please excuse me, I have just had a serious operation. Must we really remain here until Monday?" Later, as she spoke about this, she said she did not know what suddenly gave her the courage, somehow she was feeling so broken, everything seemed so useless, that for a moment, fear had abandoned her. All of a sudden the Gestapo officer turned and for the first time, he looked at them, at her. "How is it possible that you speak such excellent German?" he asked. "Are you German? You can't be. Jews do not speak classical German!" "I went to German schools" my mother responded "and in our community, intelligent people are raised to speak both languages equally well." To everyone's amazement, the official announced that he first had to read through the letter accompanying the three prisoners. It was in a blue folder which had traveled with them from the Brno Gestapo. My mother knew or assumed that the folder would contain a description of their 'crime'. Once more, she heard her own voice, speaking, very politely and quietly, "Please, may I ask what we are being accused of?" "Er, ehm," he was responding rather uncertainly, "what you are accused of -- ah - er - that is difficult to explain." Suddenly, a driver appeared, probably summoned in answer to a hidden bell. "Fritz, would you be willing to take these two men across the border yet today?" The border was not far, only a short distance beyond an avenue of trees. "If it is the Oberstaatsführer's wish, of course I will" responded Fritz, the driver. "Wish or order, do it if you can!" (an unheard of pronouncement by a Gestapo officer). "Take these two men and drive them across the border!" This time it was my father's turn to ask a question. "Excuse me please, Herr Oberstaatsführer, but what about my wife?" "I know what I am doing! Your wife will follow!" My father

hardly dared touch my mother's hand in a gesture of 'farewell' or 'good-bye', they did not know - and both men were gone. My mother heard the banging of a car door and then the sounds of the car leaving. She described that as one of her worst moments. There she remained, with a Gestapo officer who behaved almost humanly, yet she had no idea whether she could trust him or not. She was still standing. "Please, may I sit down?" "Yes, of course, please sit down. Naturally, you may sit down." Her knees shook as she finally sat down and watched him pacing up and down with a cigarette. The German military songs were still blaring through the speaker in the wall. "May I disturb you once more?" she heard herself asking. "Please do," was the surprising response. "I really don't know what is going to happen to us and why we are here." "The details are not given in here," he said, "but it is probably not so terrible. Perhaps you will be free in Slovakia and then you might find out." For the first time, Nelly raised her eyes toward him; his words gave her reason to hope that perhaps she too would be taken across the border. Then everything became completely silent. The radio stopped, the Oberstaatsführer smoked, read a book, and lit another cigarette. Nelly sat there in the silence for an hour, two, she did not know. Sometime later she heard footsteps again. The car had returned from Slovakia. "You may go now, good luck!" said the Gestapo officer. Nelly thanked him and walked shakily to the car where another Gestapo officer sat in front, next to Fritz, the driver. She sat alone in the back of the 'fashionable' (her word, in English) luxury car, courtesy of the Gestapo. They drove through the tree-lined avenue, on and on and finally, there was the border, the gates were raised without stopping or questioning. The border guard glanced at her, saluted and waved them on. They were in Holíč^v, the first Slovakian village.

They drove up to a small hut, the car door was opened, the Gestapo official came to Nelly's side of the car, clicked his heels and held out his hand. "Good luck in your homeland" he said. Nelly later reflected that had she had character or backbone, she would not have returned his hand–shake. But out of the corner of her eye, she had already seen Miki, standing in front of the shack . Perhaps subconsciously she did not want to jeopardize their fragile 'good' fortune with a gesture that would have had little meaning for anyone and could, on the other hand, have dramatically changed their situation. Mr. Deutsch had disappeared by that time.

They were now under the guard of a relatively lowly village gendarme, who had no idea what to do with them. This, my mother commented, was an organizational error, almost unheard of under the Germans. But Slovakia was still not quite under their control, so things were a little more lax there. They had not a penny between them, and despite their ordeals, they were hungry and thirsty. Miki asked if there were a Jewish community center here (a Kehilah) but the Gendarme looked completely blank. He had never heard of such a thing; he was aware of a Mr. Kurt Kohout however, who was Jewish and lived in the village , but whether one could approach Mr. Kohout, was a completely different matter. At this point of the interview, my mother turned to my father and asked him whether she should mention the visit to Mr. Kohout, which she described as shameful . Miki was reluctant. He was incapable of speaking badly of anyone, let alone of someone who was probably no longer living. It turned out that the Gendarme's instinct about Mr. Kohout had been correct. Although he was the chairman of the local Jewish community, he was embarrassingly unhelpful. Miki and Nelly, together with the gendarme, knocked on Mr. Kohout's door. " What do

you want? It is Saturday afternoon and I am resting." Nelly excused herself politely and explained that they had been expelled to Slovakia by the Gestapo, directly from jail, had not a penny, no food, nowhere to go and no means whereby to contact relatives in Slovakia who would send money and be able to help. "And what am I supposed to do?" asked Mr. Kohout. At this point in the interview Miki again shook his head disapprovingly. "Liebchen, why don't you just leave this whole episode alone?" Nelly continued however. "It needs to be remembered." They went on to explain that Miki's family, his mother, two brothers and three sisters all lived in Slovakia, in Kežmarok^V. They needed to borrow just enough money for a telephone call and to be able to survive until they could receive help from the family. Mr. Kohout was still hesitating. He still could not see what that had to do with him, he said. It occurred to my mother that, completely by chance, there had been a sterling silver powder compact in the purse that she had grabbed as they were leaving their home on the afternoon of their arrest. How long ago that all seemed now! She placed it on the table before Mr. Kohout and asked if he could please lend them fifty crowns in return, until it was possible for the family to transmit emergency funds. Finally he agreed. My father interjected once more, asking why she felt she had to bring all this up again, he thought it was all unnecessary and added nothing to the story. "But it's true and it's sad!" my mother insisted. They received fifty crowns from Mr. Kohout who then accompanied them to a hotel in the village where they could stay the night. They telephoned the family, asked for five hundred crowns, describing where they were and reassuring everyone that they were safe and would explain everything later. The money arrived, Mr. Kohout received his fifty crowns and returned my mother's powder compact. They arrived in Kežmarok^V, anxiously awaited by the whole town. Everyone brought

clothes, underwear, shoes, money. They bathed , slept, rested and repeated their story endlessly.

Their bliss was short lived however. One day after their arrival, the Hlinka Guards (the Slovak fascist police) came to the house, having been notified by the ever efficient Gestapo that Nicholas Polgar had been expelled to his home country. He had been released at the border and had not yet registered with the police. Had he escaped? The Hlinka Guards were inquiring whether he had appeared at his mother's house. Miki heard the conversation and went out into the hall to identify himself. Nelly followed him, but before she reached the door, my father's brother, Hugo (Potzak) the uncle who used to pay and reward me if only I would play in the mud, grabbed her arm. He realized that they had not mentioned her name, nor had they asked for Nicholas Polgar's wife . It was never advisable to volunteer. The police had instructions to enlist Miki in a labor camp, where he was to report at six o'clock next morning.

So Miki reported to the labor camp and Nelly remained, ostensibly hidden, in the house of her mother in law, my Grandmother Polgar and Uncle Hugo who was unmarried and still lived with his mother. Nelly found life difficult at that time, because she felt like a burden: Miki was in the labor camp, her child was far away, she was depressed and she needed to contribute toward the household. She wanted to work.. She did a little knitting for 'pin' money and even that annoyed the family. They did not want her to do anything, they were not only generous and kind, but they were also afraid that she would inadvertently reveal her identity. Nothing better could have happened than the fact that the Gestapo

as well as the Slovakian police had apparently forgotten that she existed. It was Nelly who came upon the idea of a false identity.

In the meantime, Mitzi in Brno had somehow received word that Nelly and Miki were alive, but were unable to return to the apartment which they had had to leave so suddenly and unexpectedly in the Brno ghetto.. She also learned where they were and set about protecting and rescuing as many of their possessions as she could. In her inimitable way, she managed to spirit away the few pieces of furniture from the ghetto apartment. Most of our valuables had already been put either in storage or for "safe" keeping with Aryan friends , before the other families had moved into our apartment. Mitzi ultimately managed to save several of my parents' things. Most of the friends who had offered to take care of furniture, linen, silverware, carpets, later either denied having done so, or claimed to have had to hand it in to the Gestapo. Consequently, we found ourselves invited to dinner or tea to several homes after the war, where we sat on my parents' chairs, ate with their silverware and used their china. A similar situation was encountered by many other individuals (or families if they were lucky) who happened to survive the camps.

Mitzi was a fighter and she did not give in easily. She had remarried at the beginning of the war, soon after my departure. Her husband's name was Max Schwartz, an elegant handsome man whom she had insisted on marrying in the only remaining synagogue in Brno., not because she desired a religious ceremony but because she delighted in aggravating the Nazis. Jewish ceremonies of all kinds were forbidden of course and a gathering, albeit a small

one, in or around a synagogue, jeopardized the safety and lives of everyone present. Mitzi wanted a proper wedding, with a rabbi and no one, she said, was going to deprive her of her wish. My mother recounted how relieved they all were when they finally arrived home without incident. Max was arrested, deported and murdered in one of the camps soon after the wedding. Mitzi received a telegram which informed her that he had died 'of pneumonia'. Such notifications were sent to next of kin very early during the war, using euphemisms for "murder". After all, the Germans were model organizers. A few months later, as millions were gassed and slaughtered, notifications were no longer distributed. Once more, Mitzi found herself a widow. She continued to live in the apartment within the building of the old people's home and took care of those who remained. When transports started to depart for "The East", she sent packages, letters and helped whomever she could. One day, in 1942, she was summoned to the Gestapo. She was ordered to abandon her 'Jewish pig relatives and friends'. After all, they said, they were not blood relatives, and how could she, a descendant of the pure, heroic Aryan race, insult the Herrenvolk, by associating with Jewish swine? Furthermore, her husband (my grandfather Jokl) was dead, as was her second husband, Max Schwartz – they knew everything, including dates of birth, names of Miki, Nelly, my name etc.. They assured her that they were also aware of her underground activities. She never found out to what or which activities they were referring. (Max was incidentally her third husband, not her second; the first, the only non Jew, was the alcoholic whom she had left in Vienna, after the death of their son). The Gestapo had a proposition for Mitzi. They insisted on calling her Mrs. or Frau Fischer, her maiden name, although she had now taken Max's name, Schwartz. If she renounced the whole Jewish family with whom she was associated and ceased all her 'illegal' activities which

undermined the safety of the Third Reich, she could live in peace, in her own home, with the protection of the Nazi government. (Mitzi interpreted that as an invitation to become a collaborator or informant for the Nazis.) If she did not comply, they threatened, she would have to move out of her home within twenty four hours, her house and contents would be taken over by the Gestapo, her income and work permit would cease. She would have to find shelter with strangers, none of whom, the Gestapo was convinced, would risk their lives by harboring a Jew-friend (Judenfreund). Mitzi chose the latter option.

Within twenty four hours she was out of the house, having managed to find not only a little room for herself with kind (and courageous) friends, but also to smuggle a few of her most treasured possessions into storage. All this took great skill, courage, money and a huge network of dedicated friends and supporters. She survived the war in that little room, in forced labor, under Nazi bosses , under whose noses she continued to send regular packages to friends and relatives in concentration camps. She was an anchor of loyalty, stability and resistance in Brno, throughout the war. After liberation, when a few survivors, some 3000, from the original 60,000 , started straggling back home, she was frequently the only one who could provide information about lost loved ones. Furthermore, her own family, brothers and sisters nieces, nephews, were all Nazi sympathizers. They rejected her, severed all contact with her and, as she later learned, it was one of her brothers who had instigated the summons to the Gestapo where she was ordered to denounce her Jewish relatives. Mitzi had even maintained connections with my parents in Slovakia and through some roundabout way, I think she knew of their whereabouts for at least the first few years. Many events were to take place, however, before my parents found and

were reunited with her in that little room in Brno in the spring of 1945.

SCHWESTER SUSANNA SCHLESINGER

Once Nelly mentioned the idea of a false identity, Hugo, although skeptical and concerned, referred her to an old friend in Kežmarok, whom they called 'The Consul'. His name was Mr. Berger (I never heard his first name) and my mother described him affectionately as a "little Jew, unbelievably bright, with sideburns and a hat". I do not know if I ever met him, but he must have survived the war, because, in her interview, Nelly mentioned that he had died in New York. That is all I know about this brave, kind man who apparently had knowledge of and access to every archived document in the district. He was acquainted with the system whereby records of all kinds were organized and stored, and, he was a long-standing friend of the family. It was Hugo who visited him and told him that he needed excellent, authentic, credible papers for his sister - in - law. Mr. Berger nodded but promised nothing. Two weeks later, he knocked on the door of my grandmother's house, bearing identity papers as well as birth certificate and other documents, belonging to a forty two year old, unmarried woman whose name was Susanna Schlesinger. The family commented that Schlesinger was a Jewish name, but Mr. Berger reassured them that the local Schlesingers were Protestants. Susanna had left her home town some twenty five years ago, initially to go into domestic service in Prague. She had never been heard from since. This was a helpful piece of information because whenever someone died, committed suicide, was married or changed their status in any way, the registry office, parish or other birth recording institution, was always notified. Records were meticulously maintained, both under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Czechoslovak Republic. The clerk of Miss Schlesinger's local parish was a Hungarian. When approached by Mr.

Berger whom he greatly respected, he apparently said he would do anything to help a member of the Polgar family. He considered it an honor and, to everyone's astonishment, he produced Miss Schlesinger's original birth certificate and other documents!! Unfortunately I never knew his name, nor am I aware of his fate. Although I have no doubt that he was handsomely rewarded by kind Hugo at the time and my father after the war, I will never cease to think with deep admiration and gratitude of those who were willing to risk their lives and those of their families, for others.

It was decided that, should, by chance, an inquiry be received about the whereabouts of Miss Susanna, the response would be that rumor had it that she had returned to her home town after all these years, to look for work. Her father and mother had both worked in a local tobacco factory, their years of birth had been the same as Nelly's parents' years of birth, namely 1870 the father's and 1874 the mother's. Like Nelly's parents, both had died. Susanna's birthday was August 18th 1900; she was three years older than Nelly who was thirty nine at the time. There were many other details, important and trivial, all potentially vitally important, about 'her family' that Nelly had to memorize. She did so eagerly and with ease. The family continued to try to convince her not to risk her life. They wanted her to stay with them. After all, they insisted, the authorities seemed to have forgotten that she existed or perhaps they were never aware that she had arrived in Kežmarok with Miki, so why tempt fate? Nelly however hated being a burden upon the family. She had little to do, felt superfluous and useless. She wanted to work and to be independent even though she had no idea what she would do or where she could go.

My father's elder brother Gyuri (George) has been mentioned previously. He, his wife Wally and my cousin Walter were living some two hours distance from Kežmarok, more toward the east of Slovakia, in a village called Margecany. Gyuri had a large medical practice which he was still permitted to maintain at that time, in 1942. It covered many surrounding villages, in one of which, called Jaklovce, there was a large castle - like mansion, with a huge staff and grounds. The owners, Peter and Helen Druska had just had a new baby, little Peter, who had been delivered by Gyuri. Big Peter, as he became known after the birth of his son, was a forest engineer and both he and Helen were fervent antifascists. In fact their home later became one of the planning headquarters and secret meeting places for the organization of the 1944 Slovak national uprising. Peter and Helen were interested in finding a nurse / nanny for the baby and asked Dr. Gyuri if by chance he knew of someone who might be interested in living in their beautiful, but very secluded, out-of-the-way home. Gyuri of course knew just the person, but as he contacted my mother, Hugo and the rest of the family in Kežmarok, he commented that, if Nelly had the courage to apply for the position, he thought that Peter and Helen deserved to know the truth about Nelly's identity, prior to finalizing their decision whether or not to hire her. Nelly agreed immediately. She considered this to be the chance of a life-time. Peter and Helen, decent, courageous people that they were, also agreed. They were told, by Gyuri, that Nelly was Jewish, with a husband in a labor camp and a daughter in England, that she had been exiled, on the basis of her husband's Slovakian nationality, to Kežmarok and was living with his family. Furthermore, she was Gyuri's sister-in-law. Soon after, an advertisement appeared in the local newspaper, seeking an older nanny, preferably unattached, for a baby in a secluded castle, far out in the country, away from communication. Nelly

responded as Susanna Schlesinger, explaining that she had recently returned to her home town, having spent twenty five years in Prague and Brno, mostly also working as a children's nanny. She added that she was quite alone and unattached and would love to take care of a newborn baby. (Helen and Peter later told Nelly that they received three letters in response to their advertisement, and even if they had not agreed previously to hire Dr. Polgar's sister-in-law , they would have done so on the basis of her letter, which apparently was far and away the most appealing sounding of the three). Nelly / Susanna continued her letter of application by accounting for her imperfect knowledge of the Slovakian language (which is similar but not identical to Czech) by her long absence from Slovakia. She assured her future employers that she spoke Czech and German perfectly in addition to some French and English, and mentioned that she had taken courses in infant and child care at the Children's Hospital in Brno,. The latter was true, she took such a course prior to my birth in order to be better prepared to take care of me. The Druskas responded by return of post (Nelly had given a post office box as her return address) that they would like her to start work at the beginning of the next week. They required no references and made no inquiries. This was somewhat careless on their part. If anyone had been following the correspondence - and mail was being randomly but frequently censored – the fact that this well known wealthy family was hiring a nurse for their firstborn, sight unseen, without references, could have aroused dangerous suspicions. Fortunately no one intercepted the correspondence and Nelly had one week to prepare for her new employment, her new life and her new identity. Nelly's old friend Elsie Hartmann decided that a nurse needed a uniform and from old blue and white and pink and white striped sheets, she created cotton dresses, two white coats

(white sheets) and attractive starched white caps. Somewhere in an old first aid box, she found a pin with a red cross on it which she gave Nelly as a good luck present. My mother had that little pin for the rest of her life. She never described her feelings or fear as she left the relative safety of her mother-in-law's home and embarked upon this incredibly courageous adventure as a completely different person. Nelly Polgar née Jokl disappeared from the face of the earth.

During the first week of February 1943, Schwester Susanna descended from the train at the Jaklovce railway station, carrying a small suitcase which contained all her worldly belongings. She was met by the driver from the castle and in answer to his questions about the rest of her luggage, she responded confidently that it was being shipped separately and would be delivered directly to the house. Hovering nearby on the platform was my Uncle Gyuri, reassuring himself (and later the family) that all had gone according to plan. Neither of them gave any sign of recognition of course. But the driver raised his cap, greeted Gyuri respectfully and explained: "That's our Doctor Polgar. He's a Jew, but he's a good doctor, we all like him." By then most Jews had already been deported or, like my father, were in forced labor camps.. But since there were few physicians in Slovakia anyway (many Czech physicians had served in Slovakia before the war and been forced to return home, once Slovakia had become Nazi friendly) a few Jewish physicians had received an official exemption and were allowed to maintain their practices. For a brief period of time, they were also allowed to house their direct relatives, namely spouse, children and parents – not siblings - within their homes. As a result of this exception, my Grandmother Polgar later moved away from Kežmarok and lived in the village of Margecany

with Gyuri, Wally and their son, my cousin Walter So for a short time during Susanna's career with the Druska family, some of her in-laws lived in the vicinity.

Nelly described her life at the castle as good. She felt fortunate to be there in relative safety, to be able to do what she enjoyed most, namely to take care of a little child. Peter had been born in January 1943, so he was a month old when she arrived and not quite two years when she left. Apart from Peter and Helen no one in the large household, nor the many people who worked in the gardens, grounds and forests around, knew Susanna's true identity. There was no contact with the Polgars, apart from rare occasions when Dr. Gyuri would make a house call to someone in the castle, mostly baby Peter. Sister Susanna would assist him by undressing the baby or holding his instruments. On those occasions, he sometimes made a comment about his mother's health, or about his brothers, complaining that he had not heard from them for several months, and Susanna would respond politely, as if she were empathetic but neutral. Rarely, Dr. Gyuri's wife Wally, would telephone to Helen about a prescription for a member of her staff, suggesting that she, Wally or Walter would be in the vicinity, if someone could meet them half way. On such occasions, Susanna would receive orders to take the baby for a walk in his carriage and pick up the prescription or the medication from Dr. or Mrs., Polgar. So Nelly would learn tit-bits of news about her loved ones, but such meetings were kept to a minimum. She never entered any of the villages near Margecany (Gyuri's home) because she, Miki and I had spent many vacations there; someone could easily have recognized and reported her. Occasionally, when she and Nelly were alone, out of everyone else's earshot, Helen would call her 'Nelly' and allow her to

reminisce a little about her prewar life, but such moments were few and far between. Most of the time, she was Schwester Susanna, treated rather arrogantly and superciliously by her mistress. Susanna had no trouble taking care of little Peter, who later called her 'teta' (auntie). She played with him, taught him nursery rhymes, sang to him, created little surprises for everyone. For example, she made a little sailor suit for Christmas, which was a surprise for his parents and a set of cloth and wool animals for Peter. They included a teddy-bear with which he slept until he was thirteen. On her bedside table, Susanna had a little picture of me. When the cook who sometimes visited Schwester Susanna in her room, or the maid who cleaned it, asked who the little girl was, she responded that that was the little girl whom she had taken care of before she accepted the position with little Peter. My mother often added, when she was reminiscing about those times, that that was the only true answer about her past that she was ever able to give. Everyone else assumed of course that she had been the little girl's nanny too!

One morning, during Schwester Susanna's stay at the castle, they found my Uncle Gyuri murdered by the wayside, golden crowns missing from his teeth, with a piece of paper attached to his body: "I am a filthy Jewish swine." This of course meant an immediate end to exemption from deportation for my Aunt Wally, cousin Walter who was about 15 or 16 at the time and my Grandmother. In addition, since everyone in the surrounding villages knew, liked and respected the family, they thought they needed someone 'neutral' who knew them less well or not at all, who would break the news of her son's murder, to my Grandmother. The villagers decided that the only "neutral" person with no ties whatsoever to the Polgar family, was Schwester Susanna! So, in their thoughtful kindness, the

local families designated Schwester Susanna to convey the gruesome tidings to Dr. Polgar's family and his mother who was almost 70 years old. This of course was out of the question. Not only had Nelly herself suffered a great loss which she could not acknowledge, after all she 'hardly knew' Dr. Polgar, but she could not risk visiting his home in case someone there recognized her and reported her to the police. After the war, she frequently repeated that one of her most difficult moments as Schwester Susanna was when she saw the contempt in the eyes of the villagers when she refused to visit Gyuri's mother to provide support and convey condolences. They accused her of unwillingness to perform a kindness on behalf of all of them, to a Jewish family, even perhaps of secretly approving of the murder. They wondered whether there were other ways in which she was sympathetic to the Nazis. After all, they said, Schlesinger was a German name, why had it not occurred to them before that she was 'not one of them'? What irony, what pain this must have caused my mother! I never did find out who finally told the family. I do know that Wally, Walter and my Grandmother were whisked away immediately by a kind and courageous Catholic priest, to a nearby convent, where Wally and Walter survived. They emigrated to Israel after the war.

Grandmother Polgar is said to have become depressed after Gyuri's death. He was the last of her six children with whom she had had any contact, There was no news of any of the other five, their spouses or children, her grandchildren. One day, she suddenly came out of hiding, into the yard of the convent and, waving her arms, she shouted:" Come and get me. I am Jewish. I have no right to live. All six of my children are dead. All of my grandchildren are dead! No one is left. I no longer want to live!" Someone heard her and probably received a

reward for bringing this elderly, frail, tiny, white-haired lady to the attention of the mighty Gestapo. She was deported to Ravensbrück, together with a little distantly related girl, Vera Ritter, three or four years old at the time, left in my grandmother's care by her parents who had been deported from Kežmarok, some two years earlier. It was this tiny child who told of Fanny Polgar's death in Ravensbrück, as she held little Vera in her arms. Vera survived Ravensbrück and more. After a period in a tuberculosis sanitarium in the Tatra mountains (in Slovakia) after the liberation, she and her mother who also survived, emigrated to Israel. Vera became a successful pediatrician.

I mentioned previously that the castle became one of the headquarters for the Slovakian national uprising against the Germans. This occurred in August 1944. Peter Druska was one of the leaders and many preparatory clandestine meetings had taken place inside the castle. As the fighting broke out, Germans entered the village and requisitioned the castle for themselves. A lieutenant walked in, with a fierce looking dog, and demanded, in German, to speak with the master of the house. Peter appeared and, although he understood and spoke German, he insisted that he needed an interpreter. Schwester Susanna was summoned and the first sentence she interpreted was about a rumor that the lieutenant had heard about Jews being harbored in the castle. The lieutenant assured Mr. Druska proudly, that his dog (who showed his teeth upon hearing his name) was trained to attack, as soon as he heard the word 'Jew'. Even as his master pronounced the word, the dog had to be restrained. The lieutenant was demonstrating a warning, he said. The dog could also smell Jews and attacked immediately.

Peter decided, not surprisingly, that the family, with a skeleton staff, would be safer if they escaped to the woods. They stayed at a secluded hunting lodge, which Helen, little Peter, Schwester Susanna, the cook, the driver, together with a few others, reached in a car followed by a truck. Initially my mother marveled at the luxury of evacuation in a car as well as a truck filled with domestic items, until she learned that the bottom of the truck contained weapons for the partisans and other members of the resistance movement in the surrounding forests. It was Slovakia's finest hour. The rebellion continued for four weeks, until it was finally suppressed by the German army.

The uprising marked the second phase of my mother's life as Schwester Susanna. She continued to take care of little Peter, but she also became a contact for the freedom fighters and the partisans. She knew their hiding places, took food prepared by the Druskas' cook and carried baskets with hidden weapons, verbal coded messages and written communications. She felt she had nothing to lose and was not afraid. As the rebellion continued and was initially victorious, the Germans moved in with heavy artillery. Peter once more arranged for his family to move to safety, this time to the more western part of Slovakia. By then, however, the front was approaching also and with it more rumors about hidden Jews. Peter told Susanna that he could no longer protect her, but that he would try to help her escape.

The plan was as follows. Although Schwester Susanna had not been paid at all for her time as Peter's nurse, Big Peter had registered her for health insurance. That proved to have been a wise move. He decided that since she was officially registered, perhaps she could find 'employment' with some friends of his, a

physician and others, who lived high up in the Tatra Mountains, in a health resort called Štrbské Pleso .(Pleso means lake and Strba is the name of a village high up in the mountains, a favorite winter and summer tourist spot. Štrbské is an adjective of Štrba, hence the name: 'Štrba Lake'). Peter's physician friend owned a sanitarium up there and Peter advised that Susanna tell as much of the truth as possible. She had been nurse to the Druskas' little boy, but the front was approaching and the family could no longer employ her under the dangerous and changed circumstances which they faced. He thought Susanna could perhaps help in the kitchens, or with patients, after all she was skilled and enterprising. He hoped and thought she would be safe there.

No one could travel freely around the country at the time, everyone needed travel permits, stating a reason for the trip.. Peter approached the lieutenant with the Jew friendly dog and requested a permit for his son's nurse to travel to a hospital, because she was sick. Surprisingly, the Nazi officer provided not only a permit for the German Schwester who had 'interpreted so competently' for him, but also a car with driver and escort to accompany her safely and in style, to the railway station. So Susanna said a teary goodbye to little Peter, to whom she had grown very attached, as well as to Helen, Peter and the many staff who by now had accepted her as part of the household. She later spoke with great affection about many of them, particularly Margit -neni (aunt Margit in Hungarian) the huge kind hearted cook who delighted little Peter, the family , partisans and rebels alike with her delicious culinary creations.. Gone were the sunny days spent playing with little Peter in the spectacular parks surrounding the castle, gone were the occasional intimate chats with Helen, in the quiet, secluded privacy of Helen's bedroom suite. The day Susanna left the Druska

family forever, was dark, cold rainy and hostile. She boarded the train for Poprad, the nearest station from which the High Tatra Mountains were accessible.

The saddest ending to this part of the story is, that twenty one years later, 'little' Peter, by then a gifted student of architecture at the University, was killed, mountain climbing in those very mountains, the High Tatras, where he was vacationing with a group of friends, also students. His parents were called in the middle of one night, in the summer of 1964, by the police, requesting that they identify the body of their only son, their only child ! My mother who had remained in touch, whom he still called 'moja teta' (my auntie) flew to the funeral and was almost as devastated as his own mother.

Susanna arrived at her destination in the evening. As she descended from the train, she faced a two to three hour hike up to the top of the mountain, where the hotels as well as the sanitarium were located. In peacetime, the mountain village, which in reality was just a cluster of buildings, had been easily accessible by cable car. There were no available hotels in Poprad , nowhere where she could spend the night. She thought sadly of the many times we had arrived at that very same station as a family, happily anticipating a vacation with my grandmother Polgar and the rest of my father's family. It was the same station where we changed trains and boarded a little local one for Kežmarok.

Sometimes we did not even have to change trains because Uncle Hugo would meet us at Poprad in the car and take us directly to Kežmarok . My grandmother would be waiting with welcoming hugs and lots of delicious food. All this went through my mother's mind, as she stood, completely alone on the now silent,

abandoned station. She could not embark upon the long climb alone in the dark. She did not know the way and all the tourist signs and indicators, even had she been able to find them in the dark, had been removed during the war, by the partisans. She had just decided to spend the night on a bench on the platform, when the station master approached her. He spoke Slovakian and appeared neither hostile, nor particularly curious about her. She had a little money which Peter had insisted on giving her for the journey which she had promised to return as soon as possible. She decided to ask the station master if he knew of anyone who, for a fee, would be willing to guide her to the sanitarium at the top of the mountain. By that time it was about eight thirty and pitch dark. The station master agreed to take her into town (he was due to go off duty) and inquire whether his neighbor, who in peace time was a member of the mountain rescue team, would serve as her guide. Susanna was lucky. She invented a reason as to why she had to reach the top urgently, yet tonight, the guide collected his gear, which included a gun, and together they set out on the long hike up the mountain. I do not know exactly how long it took them to reach the sanitarium. My mother recalled her almost indifferent emotions as the guide periodically asked her to walk ahead instead of abreast of him. Each time, she expected him to shoot her in the back; after all he had offered to carry her small suitcase and for all he knew, it could have contained valuables. No one would ever have found out what happened to her, nor would anyone have thought to look for her there. Each time however, he would relieve himself quite noisily, perhaps even sensing her fears, then he would catch up with her and resume their ascent. They finally arrived in the grounds of the sanitarium after midnight. As soon as they approached the entrance, Susanna sensed there was something wrong. A guard in Nazi uniform was in the porter's lodge and rowdy drunken shouting, mixed

with German songs could be heard from inside. The guide, having fulfilled his commitment and having been paid in advance, set down my mother's suitcase and disappeared into the night. He was obviously not at all anxious to encounter the Gestapo or whoever it was who had taken over the sanitarium. Once more my mother found herself in mortal danger, alone, with no possibility of escape. The guard stood before her and asked what she wanted. She stammered an explanation about having heard about available work at the sanitarium. Her train had been delayed, she said, there had been no lodgings available in the town, so she had undertaken the trip up the mountain. Whether or not he believed her, the guard informed her that the sanitarium had been taken over by the Gestapo. They were now in charge. She was a nurse, she said, showing her little red cross pin, and had been told to report to Dr. Pullmann, the head of the sanitarium. Did the officer by any chance know where she could find Dr. Pullmann ?

The guard told her to wait and as he entered one of the rooms in the building, the noisy shouting suddenly stopped. He indicated to her to follow him inside. Suddenly she found herself in a brightly lit room full of Gestapo. Many were lounging around, the atmosphere reeked of smoke and alcohol "Was wünschen Sie, Schwester?" they asked quite jovially, as if they were quite accustomed to the appearance of strange nurse on their doorstep in the middle of the night. My mother was not sure whether their slurred speech was a good sign for her, or whether it might result in sudden violence and perhaps death. She repeated her story, speaking the excellent German that had helped her so many times previously, but never had she been in a situation which she considered as hopeless as this one. "Well, your Dr. Pullmann has been given new quarters

which you might like to share!" they told her, throwing their heads back and laughing raucously. "Take her to Dr. Pullmann!" "Jawohl, Herr Kommandant!" saluted the guard and beckoned to my mother to follow him. Two or three floors below ground, he unlocked a door, pushed her unceremoniously inside and departed, locking the door behind him. She found herself in a dimly lit room with several other people. I do not think she ever told me exactly how many, nor who they all were. Perhaps she did not know. Dr. Pullmann, the owner and head of the sanitarium was there, a prisoner in his own building which had been taken over by the Gestapo just two days previously. Schwester Susanna introduced herself and mentioned Peter Druska's name which of course she had not done in the presence of the Gestapo. Dr. Pullmann immediately trusted her (she did not divulge her real identity) and anxiously advised her to leave if she could as early in the morning as possible. He could do nothing at all for her, He was eager of news however of his friend Peter and others with whom Peter associated. It was obvious that he was anti Nazi and my mother guessed that he was in the resistance. They spent the night talking, my mother was very careful to remain completely neutral and to say nothing that could remotely compromise her, even though she felt great sympathy for Dr. Pullmann.

In the morning, the door was unlocked and bread and a warm liquid was brought to the prisoners by the guard from the night before. The Schwester was to return down into the valley, since there was obviously no employment for her here. The prisoners were to remain and the door was locked behind my mother. She found herself descending the mountain. Her knees were shaking and she thinks she passed out, because it was light when she came to. Miraculously I think she still had her suitcase (she did not mention having lost it) and three or four hours later

she was back at the Poprad railway station. A train was due to arrive relatively soon, bound for Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. She had no idea where she would go, what she would do. She boarded the train and as it began to move, she wished that it would just go on forever and never reach its destination.

As she listened to the rhythmic sounds of the wheels on the rails, my mother stared out of the window into the night and wondered what to do next. She befriended an old woman who was cleaning the bathrooms of the wagon and spent the night in her presence. I do not know what they talked about, but perhaps anything was preferable to my mother's own thoughts and anxieties. Taking care of the bathrooms on the railroad was the woman's livelihood and my mother admired her equanimity, common sense and the aura of resignation she exuded. All that somehow helped. They arrived in Bratislava in the early hours of the next morning and her new friend offered Susanna hospitality, again in the bathroom of the station. At least it was relatively warm there. After the woman had left to go home, it was the end of her shift, my mother once more found herself sitting on a bench at yet another railway station. As she sat and tried to concentrate on her knowledge of Bratislava, which was not intimate, she suddenly remembered the name of a former family acquaintance who was an attorney and owned an office in town. She did not remember him as a fascist or in any way hostile person, but she knew nothing of his circumstances, his family, or whether he was even still in town. He was her only hope or, as she said later, the only idea that occurred to her. She decided to try to find and approach him with a request for employment. After all she did have some paralegal experience from the past. Again she was fortunate. The address of his office was in a

telephone book and somehow, she found her way there. I am unaware of details apart from the fact that he received her, listened to her story about her employment in a wealthy Slovakian family as nurse and nanny and the need to escape from the approaching war front in the east, because the family was being evacuated and could no longer employ her. I no longer know the name of the attorney, although my mother mentioned it. She also implied that she thought he suspected, from the beginning, that she was not who she said she was. He allowed her to work for him as a secretary (she did have a letter of reference from Peter Druska) and, in addition, since she had nowhere to go and no money with which to pay for rent, he offered her a couch within the office, on which she could sleep at night, after everyone else had left.

She had worked in the office for perhaps two to three weeks, when she became acquainted with one of the other women there, a single middle aged person with whom she sometimes chatted at lunch time. She told Susanna that she lived in a small apartment with two other single middle aged women, one of whom was her sister. There was a spare couch (or bed) in the apartment and Susanna was welcome to share it if she wished. By now, Susanna was receiving a truly nominal wage for her services and she decided that she could afford to pay one quarter of the rent. She met the other two inmates of the apartment and thus began the third period of Susanna Schlesinger's career, as legal secretary in Bratislava, living with three single women in a small apartment in the middle of town. That is how she spent the winter and early spring of 1944 / 1945.

Their life was relatively harmonious. Her roommates called my mother 'Zuzka', a Slovakian abbreviation of Susanna and it seems that they accepted her at face

value. Again on her night table she had the same picture of me, as well as a little snapshot of Baby Peter, both children whom she had cared for during her career as a nurse / nanny, of which everyone in her present life had been informed. They understood also that she had fled from the front when her employers could no longer support her, so she hoped that there was little reason for suspicion. She recounted one episode during which she had to register, like everyone else, with the police, as a new tenant of the apartment building. Her heart stopped as the clerk who was examining her documents, suddenly raised his eyes and said, "How much longer do you think you can walk around pretending that you are not Jewish?" Susanna had the presence of mind to try to look surprised, although, as she later recalled, what she wanted to do more than anything, after all the years of stress and the recent events in her life, was to break down and, come what may, confess everything. "What do you mean?" she asked indignantly. "Schlesinger is a well known, common Jewish name," he responded, probably proud of his knowledge of such matters. "I don't know about that," she said and, as he began to question her about her religion (Susanna Schlesinger was born into a Protestant family) the dates of birth of her parents and other information from her documents, she rattled off all the answers, perhaps, as she reflected later, even a little too readily. The official apparently had no choice but to let her go, but not before he threatened to confirm every piece of information that she had given him with the registry office in Kežmarok. This frightened her because of course she had no idea who was there now, and she could not expect the reply to come from the courageous friends who had supplied her with her Susanna Schlesinger's documents. As she was leaving the office, the clerk instructed her to come back in six weeks to discuss the results of his investigations. This was understandably a black cloud

which hung over her for some time. However, as she learned later, Kežmarok^v and its surroundings was, by that time, in complete chaos, the front passed through, as did the Soviet liberating army and, even had he tried, no one could or would have received a response about anything from the local authorities ; all communication was severed until the end of the war which was still some months away.

My mother spent St. Nicholas and Christmas with her three room mates and, characteristically, with almost non existent means, prepared little presents and surprises for everyone. I heard about them when, two or three years later, the two sisters came to visit us in Brno and described how delightfully thoughtful and utterly unexpected my mother's little surprises were. She continued to work in the attorney's office and learned later that he knew the Polgar family and , although he did not suspect her relationship with them, he did suspect that she was either a member of the underground or possibly a Jew with false identity papers. So here was yet another unbelievably courageous decent person who helped to save my mother's life.

One spring day in 1945, she had a day off from work and was taking care of the laundry for the whole household. She was in the basement of the apartment building, hot from the steam coming from the boilers, stirring sheets within a huge cauldron with a large wooden spoon, when she heard the door to the laundry room open. She jumped - and cried out. There, in front of her, his face somewhat obscured by the steamy atmosphere - stood my father. I do not know the details of his search for her, nor do I know how he found her. I think that, in a complicated roundabout way she had tried to send word to a previously arranged

contact, each time she changed her address. I vaguely remember their mentioning that that had helped in his discovery of her whereabouts.

That evening, Susanna introduced her husband to her three flabbergasted room mates. One of them maintained that she had guessed all along that Zuzka was not who she said she was, she was 'different' from the rest of them, was more educated, had more life experiences etc. My mother doubted that they had guessed anything at all about her, but hindsight was a powerful argument.

Bratislava was liberated on April 20th (check date) 1945 and my parents set about trying to find a means of transportation in the direction of Brno. Although it is only 90 km distant, at that time, with the front and the Russians traveling in the same direction, it was not an easy proposition to reach Moravia. They finally succeeded in convincing a group of Romanian soldiers traveling in a convoy of trucks, to allow them to ride with them. My father's years of working in Romania and his knowledge of the language apparently played a role in the commander's granting permission for two civilians to board the trucks. The journey took many days and nights. They arrived in Brno in their home town, on May 13th 1945. Brno had been liberated on April 26th (by the Red Army) and the war in Europe had ended on V.E. Day, May 9th 1945.

MIKULÁŠ POTOČNÝ

I know much less and almost no details about my father's experience during the Holocaust. It is unclear whether he was uncomfortable talking about that time, or whether, in his characteristically humble way, he did not consider his experience important, after all, as he always emphasized, he had survived and was relatively intact, while millions had perished, including a large part of his own family.

Fragments of what I do know include a few episodic and anecdotal events which I cannot even put into accurate chronological order. The first and arguably among the most dramatic occurred while he was in the labor camp, after he and my mother had arrived in Kežmarok. The inmates were working on a railroad, high up in the mountains, hauling rocks. They traveled to and from the site on a little train which climbed up the mountain, seven days a week. One morning as they were going to work, the train stopped on the way up. "All Jews out!" came the order. For some reason, my father decided that this did not sound good. He stayed in the train. Some forty (he was never sure of the exact number) laborers assembled on the little platform below the train. Every one of them was shot, on the spot, there in front of my father's eyes. He realized that he could not continue on the train, nor could he arrive at the work station, where he would be immediately recognized, if not by name, but because all the workers were forced Jewish laborers, and he was the only one left alive. He locked himself in the toilet and when the train arrived back in the valley that night, he somehow managed to walk through the woods, always in the dark, sleeping a little during the day. I do not know what he ate, I do not know why he was not discovered in the toilet. I do

not even know how long he hid and walked. The camp was somewhere in Slovakia, probably not far from Kežmarok, because the railroad they were building was in the nearby mountains. One night he arrived back at his mother's house in Kežmarok. This had to be at the time when she and Hugo were still living there, before she moved to her son Gyuri's house.

There is a gap in my information now, as to what he did, how he was concealed between this and the next episode when he, Hugo and Annush, his new young wife, found themselves sitting on their suitcases together with many other inhabitants of Kežmarok in one of the large school yards in town. Transports to concentration camps had finally reached Slovakia. It was probably sometime toward the end of 1943 and all Jews whose names began with 'L' through 'P', had been ordered to assemble for "relocation to work in the East". This of course was a euphemism for Hitler's famous final solution for all Jews and other undesirable elements of society, including Gypsies, communists, homosexuals, enemies of the Third Reich, the physically and mentally frail. The final solution meant gas chambers and that was indeed where two of my father's sisters' families, Jolly, Rudi and Vera, Gretchen, her husband Alfred, little Tommy and their baby, ended their lives, as did my Grandmother Polgar, whose brief story is mentioned in the section on Schwester Susanna.

Perhaps an hour before they were to be herded into the waiting cattle wagons (without seats, water, air, toilets, where many of the older people and small children died, even before they reached their destination) one of the young girls from a farm near to my Grandmother's house, came running into the school yard. "Why are you sitting here like a herd of sheep waiting to be slaughtered?"

she whispered into my father's ear. "Come, I will hide you!" Neither my father, nor Hugo or Annush could immediately grasp what she was saying, nor could they believe that this inexperienced eighteen year old, who had probably not read more than two books in her life, was risking it to save three Jews who had lived next door and perhaps always been kind to her and her family. Her name was Marienka. She was tugging at Hugo's arm with an urgency and sincerity that penetrated his fears and mobilized him into action. After a whispered "Do you know what you are doing?" to Marienka, he, my father and Annush exchanged glances and, in the noise and confusion of the crowded yard, where families were clinging to each other, weeping and embracing, they succeeded in following Marienka outside the gate, into a wagon, piled high with hay, drawn by oxen. After all what did they have to lose? By then they had no illusions about "relocation for work" and although their will to survive was enormous, they did not want to endanger the life of this unbelievable young girl or her family. It is possible that the Hlinka Guardists in 1943 were less organized and less efficient than their Gestapo counterparts in the western parts of the country; it is difficult to imagine such an escape from one of the roundups of Jews in Bohemia or Moravia. Perhaps there were fewer guards, under fewer actual members of the Gestapo. I don't know and my parents never discussed that part of the story. The wagon arrived at Marienka's farm-house where she hid them in the hay loft. The next day, Nazi officials came looking for missing Jewish stragglers, equipped with guns and pitch forks. They prodded the hay where Miki, Hugo and Annush were hiding. They did not find them. The next day, guards came accompanied by dogs, but for some reason, they did not return to Marienka's farm, where the three fugitives were still hiding. They could not stay in the hayloft forever. Once more, my father found forced labor, this time under an assumed name, Mikulas

Potočný (pronounced Potochny). He had the document which is in my possession to this day, from the time he had begun to 'retrain' as an optician in Brno. As far as I know, he never used the training. Nor was Mr. Potočný, even though he was not Jewish, ever as authentic or as real a person as Schwester Susanna Schlesinger and I think his identity was relatively short lived. After the war, my father and Hugo were fortunate to be able to support and help Marienka and her family for many years.

I know that my father ended up in one or more additional labor camps, from which he managed to escape. I have no details. He also spent some time hiding as Mr. Potočný, in Bratislava, together with Kurt Mandl (one of my mother's four cousins, mentioned at the beginning of this narrative), Kurt's wife Ilse and her sister Herta. I heard many comments after the war, particularly from Herta, about my father's kind, gentle disposition, his courage and efficiency in collaborating with the resistance and underground during the weeks and months of cohabitation in Bratislava, but unfortunately, I know little more. I assume that it was during the Bratislava phase of his Holocaust experience, that he somehow learned that my mother was in the same city and was reunited with her.

THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

My parents returned to Brno aboard the Romanian convoy in May 1945. They found Mitzi who became a focal point for many survivors, as they began straggling back, even before the Red Cross stations or later Jewish community centers, were organized with daily updated lists of names and addresses of survivors seeking family members. Those lists, usually placed strategically in two or three locations in most towns, remained available for two to three years after liberation. They represented the last vestige of hope for those who had no knowledge of the whereabouts of loved ones. Occasionally, contact with someone whose name was familiar, would confirm the long suspected and dreaded information, thus providing much needed closure for a lone survivor.

Only two of my father's siblings survived. His youngest brother Hugo and his wife Annush lived in Kežmarok^v for the next two years. Hugo had owned a saw mill and was an expert on wood. After the Communist take-over of Czechoslovakia in 1948, they emigrated to Palestine, which had just become the newly born State of Israel. I remember Hugo's visits to Brno, during which he desperately tried to convince my parents to accompany them, and I cannot forget Miki's quiet sadness as he returned from Bratislava early one morning in the summer of 1948, after seeing his only surviving brother and sister-in-law board the ship.

I may have influenced my parents' decision to remain in Brno, albeit indirectly. At the time, my mother and I had little interest in or affinity toward Palestine, I had returned home shortly before, was working hard to relearn Czech, and perhaps subconsciously, I was hoping for the stability and security of our family

life, as I vaguely remembered it from before the war. From afar, I saw the few teenagers (perhaps eight?) mostly orphans who had survived the camps, with whom I had absolutely nothing in common, who sang Hebrew songs, were always seen together in a group, talked about sex and dreamed of a Jewish homeland. In my relatively sheltered state of mind, I could not imagine becoming one of them, nor could I imagine emigrating and living their way of life, as I saw it. I don't think I ever expressed any of these thoughts to my parents at the time, I did not have to. They were probably so relieved and incredulous that our nuclear family was intact, that they too were hoping for a status quo and spontaneously rejected another huge upheaval, not only for me, but probably for themselves also.

None of us of course, could have foreseen the chaos, the ruin and the devastation that the next forty years of communist dictatorship would bring upon the country and its population as it became a satellite of the Soviet Union.

The only other of my father's siblings who survived, was his elder sister Erzsi. She returned from Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen, weighing forty kilograms (some 85 pounds) a widow, recovering from typhus. She moved back to Slovakia and later she married a dear, kind man who had previously owned a factory for appliances (refrigerators, freezers etc.). His name was Aladar Stein, but later, under the anti-Semitic climate of the communist regime, he, like many others, changed his name to a more Slovakian (or, depending on the person's residence, Czech -) sounding one. He became Fillip Sklár. He too had lost his wife and two young children. It was hard to imagine a more loving or kind hearted couple. They lived in eastern Slovakia, in Košice, in a little house with a garden

and fruit trees. She loved to cook and bake, they both loved to eat. We spent several vacations with them after the war and , as a teenager, I frequently had great trouble convincing Aunt Erzsi that I preferred to spend the long summer days at the pool, or in the woods, as opposed to coming home at noon for a four to five course meal, later to be followed by an equally copious dinner in the evening, when Uncle Aladar came home. Both of them died relatively young, she was seventy, he a little older, both were grossly overweight. Their generous wedding gift to us was , among others, a refrigerator from the factory, which by then, had been nationalized by the communists. Some two years after we had received the gift, we were questioned about it by the secret communist police. They came to our house and declared that, according to current law, we had actually 'stolen' the refrigerator from the state; the factory no longer belonged to my uncle, hence he had no right to donate gifts from it. We were to return it to the 'working people' to whom it belonged. Fortunately my uncle had had the foresight to keep a receipt from the purchase which he was able to produce. So after months of harassment and correspondence during which they managed to lose the receipt irretrievably (fortunately we had kept a copy) we were allowed to keep our gift..

Erzsi and Aladar's house was situated on a sunny, quiet tree lined street in a pleasant neighborhood of Košice. Across the street lived an old friend of Erzsi's from before the war, whose name also happened to be Erzsi. She too was a young widow who had remarried and had a delightful little boy whom my aunt and uncle who had no children of their own, spoiled and adored. Aunt Erzsi's friend was an exceptionally beautiful woman and she and her first husband had had a three year old little girl when they were sent to the concentration camps in

1944. As the women stood in line, naked, approaching Mengele at the selection site, my aunt's friend was holding her little daughter in her arms. An armed guard who was herding the prisoners through the line, caught sight of the attractive, still healthy appearing young woman with the child in her arms and screamed: "Throw the child away, you can live!" She pressed her daughter even more closely to her body. Suddenly, the guard reached from behind, tore the child from her mother's arms, swung her by the legs and threw her against a cement wall behind the line of moving women. The mother's last image of her child was that of a mass of blood on the cement wall and the crumpled little body on the ground beneath it. She could not stop without endangering the lives of the whole column of women behind her. Mengele's thumb pointed to the right. She lived, but she never recovered. Her little son, born after the war, was raised predominantly by his father and my aunt and uncle across the street.

Because my mother was an only child, and both her parents had died before the war, her own immediate losses were less devastating. Her cousin Ilse Pirak, née Mandl had survived in Terezín. At age eighteen, she had left home to study in Prague. She had wanted to study medicine, but in 1923, few women were admitted to medical school, so she went to nursing school and trained as a surgical nurse. In Terezín this stood her in good stead and probably saved her life. She was among the first groups to relocate to Terezin, their purpose to convert the town which had been a military garrison, into a ghetto for, initially, the Jews of Czechoslovakia. Both of Ilse's parents were interred in the Terezín ghetto, her mother Hermina died there of heart failure, not long after they had arrived. It was a comfort to Ilse to be able to take care of her mother to the end and to be with her when she died in relative comfort, in a clean bed, with at least

her daughter holding her hand. All this happened before transports to Auschwitz were taking tens of thousands of elderly and sick people from Terezin. Ilse's father, Karl, remained and survived in Terezin, thanks to Ilse's continuous vigilance and protection. Her husband however, one of my favorite uncles, Otto Pirak, whom she had known since they were young teenagers together, volunteered for "work in Germany" toward the end of 1944. He was young, healthy and strong and believed not only that he would return (a few transports of young men had indeed been sent to Germany from Terezin to work for the war effort, and had returned) but that possibly some small advantages might accrue for Ilse and her father, in return for his willingness to join the 'work group'. Ilse reminisces sadly to this day (she is now 95) about her unfavorable premonition, that this was not a 'regular work transport', it was a need by the Nazis, she thought, for more room in Terezin for the ever increasing numbers of incoming transports from all over Europe. They spent their last night together in each other's arms, she attempting to convince him to allow her to have him admitted to the infirmary for a (real) appendectomy - a laparotomy was preferable to whatever awaited him in Germany or elsewhere - he convincing her that he would survive and be back in a month's time. Ilse knew she would never see him again. The thousands of young men were taken directly to Auschwitz, only two survived from that particular transport. Otto apparently died just days before liberation. At his request, the two survivors later visited Ilse and described not only his death but his last message to her, begging her forgiveness. She told me about the visit, which occurred while she was still in Terezin. They were surprised at the strength she demonstrated, as she questioned them about every detail of Ottel's (her endearing name for him) last

days and moments. It gave and to this day, she says, it gives her comfort; at least she knows. So many know nothing.

All three of her brothers also survived the war. Kurt was in hiding, as mentioned previously, with his wife, Ilse, in Bratislava. She completed medical school after the war and became a psychiatrist. Hans had worked for the British army, in the Middle East and returned to Brno, with his third wife, where he reclaimed some of the family property . After the communist take-over, they initially emigrated to Israel; later he lived in Germany until the end of his life. His sister Ilse, never forgave him for moving to Germany. Beno, the youngest, the father of Jiri, my childhood friend, had emigrated to Australia, later to Ireland. He had one more son, Jiri's half brother, Michael. None of us ever met Michael.

Immediately after the liberation, Mitzi helped my parents to find a large apartment, where most members of the extended family lived together. It was in the center of town, in Brno, and it housed my parents, Ilse, Kurt and his wife (they called her 'Dr. Ilse, to distinguish her from her sister-in-law), Kurt and Ilse's father, Karl, and for a brief period of time also my Aunt Erzsi, my father's sister, before her return to Slovakia and subsequent marriage to Aladar.

I know little about the immediate period following liberation. The tiny community of survivors tried to rebuild their lives from the fragments that remained. Czechs sought revenge on those who had collaborated or identified with the Nazis and organized 'death marches', so named by the Germans who participated in them. All Germans were notified that they were no longer welcome in Czechoslovakia.

They were to assemble at certain strategic points in the country and exiled to Germany or Austria. There were many such marches and Jiri, his mother Helli and her mother, Omi Paiker, were pulled out of one by my aunt Ilse and my mother in the last minute before they were to cross the border of southern Moravia into Austria. The organization of the expulsion of the German population was quite chaotic and random. After all, Jiri had suffered because he had had a Jewish father and, like other children of mixed marriages, he had been sent to a concentration camp toward the end of the war from which he had returned after its liberation. On the other hand, his mother Helli, had indeed had acquaintances and connections among the Nazis, hence the inclusion of the family in the expulsion. Another of these 'marches' was to play an important role in the life of my own future husband, Tibor Lax. I had not met him at the time, but it was a story that he later repeated quite frequently. Together with two other young Jewish men, Tibor had escaped from a forced labor camp in Hungary. They had spent the bitter winter of 1944 / 45 hiding in the woods in southern Slovakia and one of the three had found a warm military overcoat on a dead German soldier in a ditch. They had appropriated the coat and taken turns wearing it. After the liberation of Slovakia, by the Red Army, it happened to be the turn of Tibor's friend to wear the overcoat. The Russians recognized it as part of a German uniform and immediately herded the poor young man into a long straggling column of Nazis, collaborators, traitors and other prisoners, who were being shipped to Siberia. The Russians were adamant. They refused to listen to Tibor's entreaties, they ignored even members of the local communist party, whose help he had enlisted, that the emaciated, frail, innocent young man in the coat, was Jewish and himself a victim of cruel Nazi persecution. It

was not until a high ranking Soviet commander was approached, that the young man, also at the very last minute, was rescued from the train bound for Siberia.

My parents had traveled to Brno from the east, roughly simultaneously with the second president of the Czechoslovak Republic, Edward Beneš[✓], who, together with part of the government, had spent the war years exiled in London. He was known as the President Liberator, while his predecessor, Masaryk, was the Builder of the country. A few members of the government had spent the war in Moscow and it would be they who would eventually contribute to the communist take-over and the ruin of the country. From 1945 through 1947 however, people were optimistic, relieved and everyone hoped that Masaryk's, now Beneš's[✓], capitalist liberal democracy would continue as freely and successfully as it had begun before the war. My father resumed his work at Plačeks' department store and set about helping them to regain the enormous amount of property stolen by the Nazis. My mother, with Mitzi's help, began to look for a suitable apartment into which she and my father would move before they brought me home from England. There were several apartments available in post-war Brno, many in abandoned Nazi (previously Jewish) villas. My mother categorically rejected all of them although, unfortunately, we learned later that there was no shortage of Czechs who had no hesitation about moving into them and living perhaps for the next fifty years in someone else's luxury. What was more difficult for my parents, was requesting the return of our furniture, carpets and china from 'good friends' who had promised to keep it in their homes for us until we returned home. As mentioned previously, it was not easy for many individuals to part with objects that for six or seven years had graced their homes, been incorporated into them, and had by family and friends been considered to be inseparable components of

the household . Most of the 'returnees' were so happy to have a warm bed, to be free and able to walk in the street without fear of a beating, arrest or death, that they frequently found it easier not to ask for the return of their property, than to listen to excuses and reasons as to why it was not possible for them to retrieve what rightfully belonged to them. That is not to say that this happened in every instance. There were many loyal and faithful true friends who were delighted to welcome survivors and not only to return every last item, but also to add generous gifts to renewed beginnings.

So it was that, after my parents had notified us in England that they were alive, and before they decided that my mother would attempt to visit us as soon as possible, they had moved into a modern apartment in Brno, across the street from the Art Institute and diagonally across from the opera and a park. It was furnished and equipped it with whatever was left from before the war. Mitzi in the meantime, had settled with what would be her fourth husband (or partner) Arthur Schwartz. He was the brother of Max, Mitzi's third husband who had been murdered early during the war, soon after their marriage in 1941. Arthur was one of two survivors of the massacre of Jews in Minsk. He had crawled, not quite dead, out of a mass grave, which several hundred Jewish men had first dug for themselves, then been shot into. He returned, had no surviving relatives, having lost everything. He was seriously sick and had huge red, angry scars about two inches in width, extending along the back of his neck. Mitzi, once again the perfect nurse, restored him to health and civilization. He later started a business with rags and textiles and he and Mitzi became quite wealthy. Before the communists took over, they led a relatively pleasant life, visiting health spas and living in a lovely home, filled with antique furniture, oriental rugs and pictures.

They managed to maintain a home, although the communists forced them like everyone else, to exchange it for a smaller one. One person, one room was the communist decree and you were lucky if they did not count your kitchen. Around age perhaps 72 or 73, Arthur became sick and was hospitalized. He died after protracted suffering, in Mitzi's arms, of a brain tumor. Again she was at his side day and night. My mother took food to her at the hospital because she refused to leave his side. Although he did not know she was there toward the end, Mitzi insisted that he did. She said he knew when it was she who was changing his bed or his diapers, as opposed to the nurses. Unfortunately there was no one to perform the same services for Mitzi herself, when her time came, but that will be mentioned later..

One of the many consequences of Hitler's 'final solution' that became apparent relatively soon in the aftermath of the war, had such a significant impact upon the lives of survivors and their offspring, that it bears mention here. It was a sociological phenomenon and its roots were as follows. Of the few survivors who were my parents' age who had returned from the camps, many had lost a spouse, most returned without children and hardly any of their parents, namely the grandparental generation, had survived at all. From a Jewish population of XX,000 who were living in Brno before the war, 1945 saw a total of XXX straggling back in ones and twos. The 'majority' of these were in their late thirties to early fifties. It was they who, as a group, had been better equipped to withstand the physical suffering and hardships to which they had been subjected in the camps. Their own parents, as well as their children had mostly gone directly to the gas chambers. Younger parents, mothers in particular, who were carrying or leading young children through the selections, were also sent directly

to the ovens. So the surviving generation consisted predominantly of my parents' contemporaries who attempted to rebuild their lives through remarriage or new relationships. This resulted in a completely anomalous social structure within the post-war Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe. First, there were no grandparents; secondly, parents who had lost children, had also lost the greater part of their reproductive period in life. By the time they were remarried or resettled and considering new families, many were chronologically old enough to be their newborn infants' grandparents. Thirdly, the generation of those who should have been teenagers in the late forties and early fifties, that is, my own peers, my generation, was almost completely missing. Consequently, my own children, born in the second half of the fifties, were growing up with contemporaries whose parents were the peers of my parents, that is, my children's grandparents. This gap, the loss of my own generation, had an enormous, lasting impact upon the future lives of our nuclear family. However, it did not become apparent, nor were we aware of it, for many years to come.

RENATE DANIELS

I spent exactly seven years with the Daniels family, from the beginning of August 1939 when I was eight, until the beginning of August 1946, when I was fifteen. They were the years of middle and late childhood and early adolescence. Harry and I always remained close and we shared more games, secrets and adventures than probably most biological siblings. Unlike biological siblings, we never fought. I think we truly liked one another. The bungalow in which we lived, on 1, Norton Place, in Morecambe, Lancashire, had 'dormer' windows, protruding from the roof. Thus, although it was a bungalow, it had two rooms and an attic upstairs. The two rooms were our bedrooms: mine to the left, Harry's to the right of the staircase. If our doors were open, we could talk to each other, in the dark, after bedtime. I recall teaching Harry the few words of Czech (please, thank you, hello, good-bye, Mr., Mrs. etc.) that I could still remember. Later, we had more serious conversations. For example, there was a little girl my age who lived two doors up the road. Her name was Betty. She insisted on playing 'doctors' when the three of us were together, she of course was the doctor, Harry and I were her patients. One night, as we lay in bed, Harry asked whether it was true that I was going to have a baby. Betty had said that that always happened to people who either touched one another in certain places (neither he nor I was sure which places) or if boys and girls took baths together which the two of us had sometimes done. I did not know, but for some weeks I wondered how I would find out if indeed I was going to have a baby and what Auntie Edna and Uncle Harry would say if I did.

In a different context, it may be worth mentioning some of Harry's immortal expressions and deeds. He called a funeral hearse a 'heaven's coach' (his Grandpa Leeming had gone away in one while we were still in Yealand), Dalmatians were 'black currant dogs' and one Easter we saw tiny new chicks at a farm and Harry was seen squatting next to them with one in his hand 'wiping the yolk of the egg' off the poor little creature's feathers. Two other memorable episodes from our childhood occurred later. One included Harry, the other was an unforgettable experience of my own. While we were still at elementary school, at Sandylands, we usually walked to school together. One summer, we noticed some laburnum bushes on our way, in someone's garden. They were hanging over the wall onto the street, as we passed them. It was the time of year when they have finished blooming and produce green pods which closely resemble pea pods. That afternoon, we came home and announced to Auntie Miriam, Grandma Leeming's disabled sister, who happened to be staying with us, that we were not hungry, we did not want any tea that day, because we had eaten quite a lot of those peas on the way home from school. She immediately had the presence of mind to question us about the appearance, character and provenance of our 'peas'. Upon hearing our description, she alerted the whole family, as well as the family doctor. Laburnum is an extremely poisonous, potentially lethal plant. Fortunately not long after, I started to vomit spontaneously, and continued to do so throughout the night; poor Harry had to have his stomach pumped by the doctor. Neither of us was any the worse for the experience, nor were we aware of the alarm we had caused, at least I wasn't. Needless to say, we never again felt inclined to taste unknown treats on our way to school.

The purpose of recounting the next memorable event is to emphasize, with the retrospective admiration of an adult, the parenting skills of Uncle Harry. It occurred one day when I was alone at home. That time Grandma Daniels happened to be staying with us. It was wartime of course and food was quite scarce. Auntie Edna and Auntie Amy, who was living with us with her little daughter, Harry's cousin Pat, had been saving everyone's precious sugar ration until they had filled what seemed to be a very large glass jar with crystal sugar. I still see what it looked like. It was to be used for that season's bottled fruit, jams and other supplies for the winter. I was doing something in the kitchen, perhaps drying the dishes, when I accidentally bumped into the large jar which was standing on the table. It came crashing to the floor and broke into a thousand pieces. Sugar and glass were everywhere. I was surveying the scene, frightened and wondering how I was going to begin to clean up, when Uncle Harry walked into the kitchen. He seemed empathetic. "Oh dear, what happened?" he asked. I have no idea what possessed me, but at that moment, I heard myself answering, utterly uncharacteristically, "I don't know." "What do you mean, you don't know? Did you knock over the jar?" "No," I responded, and already I was feeling ashamed and embarrassed, but for some mysterious reason, I could not bring myself to change my answer. Uncle Harry looked at me quite calmly, he did not appear at all annoyed and said. "Well, that's all right then. We'll just have to ask all the others. I'm sure someone will know how it happened. After all, jars don't just jump off tables by themselves, do they?" "N -n- no" I stammered, "I suppose they don't." Uncle Harry waited. The next person to come home, was Harry. "Dan, do you know anything about this broken jar?" his father asked. Of course he didn't. By then, I was trying to sweep up some of the mess. Uncle Harry would not let me. He wanted to wait and find out who had had this

accident. He asked everyone in turn, as they came home for tea: Harry was followed by Auntie Edna, Auntie Amy with little Pat. Finally, before Grandma Daniels came home from shopping, he decided: "It must have happened to my mother. It should have occurred to me." The whole episode could not have lasted longer than perhaps a little over half an hour. It was one of the longest half hours of my life. When at last, Grandma Daniels also denied all knowledge of the broken jar, he looked at me once more and very quietly, he said, "Renate, clean it up, every last speck of it and go to your room. You will get no tea, no supper, you are not allowed to read, nor are you allowed to do your homework. If you have something urgent, that is due tomorrow, you will have to explain at school. I want you to have plenty of time to think." I got up the next morning to go to school, fearing more repercussions. The subject was never mentioned, ever again. As for me, I had learned my lesson - for life.

In general, I think I was an obedient and compliant child. I usually tried to please and help whenever I could. We played in the garden and in the street with the many other children of the neighborhood. Gradually, as we grew older, we each acquired our own friends, Harry's were boys his age, I had girl friends, but we did not grow apart. One of my friends, Margaret, had a lovely singing voice. She and I decided that we would write a script, invent songs for her to sing and perform a 'concert' to which we would invite the whole neighborhood. We would charge an entrance fee and send the proceeds to the 'War effort'. We did; she sang, I accompanied her on the piano, we both danced, performed little skits and I played a solo, the only one I could still remember from my piano lesson days, namely Smetana's lullaby from his opera 'The Kiss' (Hubička). I don't remember how much money we collected, but we received a delightful thank you letter from

some high ranking official from the 'War Office' and our names appeared in the local paper. One evening which was also unforgettable, but pleasantly so, an acquaintance of Uncle Harry's came to the house on a bicycle. A few minutes later, they called me to come downstairs from my room where I was doing homework. They showed me the bike, it was a shining racing bike, with low, curved handle bars; it was absolutely lovely. I could not believe my ears when Uncle Harry told me that it was mine! I had wished for a bike for so long and here, without even a birthday or Christmas was one which was far more beautiful than any I had imagined in my wildest dreams! I was so excited and pleased that I could not fall asleep that night. The bicycle, which I named Bessie, became my faithful companion for the whole remaining time I spent in England.

Morecambe Grammar School was the focus of my life and I will never cease to be grateful for the excellent education I received during the five years I spent there. It seems that I was the youngest child (just ten) that they had ever admitted into the first form and, although it made no difference academically, I was probably emotionally less mature than some or most of my classmates. I had a 'best friend' Sheila, who was as blond and blue eyed, as I was dark and brown eyed and since we were both about the same height, they called us 'the twins'. I was very flattered to have been chosen as her 'twin' but in retrospect I realize that she, even at eleven and twelve, was interested in boys, in parties and 'going out at night', all of which were completely alien concepts to me, although I listened to her stories about boys and sweethearts who changed from week to week. Morecambe, the town in which we lived, was an air force base during the war and we would see the men drilling and marching daily on the promenade (the cement walkway which extended along the ocean front, above the beach,

from one end of town to the other). In the evenings, the men would frequent several of the dance-halls in town which were open for their entertainment. Occasionally a girl from the Grammar School would be seen there with a soldier and reported to the headmaster or headmistress and next morning at assembly, we would all be treated to long lectures on morals; the culprit herself would have to report to the headmaster's office and receive her own private punishment. My 'twin' Sheila received several such summons and I am not surprised that neither Auntie Edna nor Uncle Harry approved of our friendship. At the time however, I was too naive and young even to understand their objections.

I must admit that I truly enjoyed school. Languages, including French, Latin and later German, were my favorites. We had four periods per week of each French and Latin, as well as of English which was divided into English language, including grammar, sentence structure, essay writing, and literature. In each of the five years I was there, we studied (among other works) one particular classic in detail for the whole year. They were *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in the first form, then *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry IVth Part II* and *Macbeth* in the second, third, fourth and fifth forms respectively. We had to analyze, express opinions, write literary essays and memorize. I remember one long night when Uncle Harry was testing my memorization of Mark Anthony's speech 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen'; neither of us went to bed before I was able to recite it three times in a row, in its entirety, without a single hesitation. I also enjoyed Math, History, hated Physics and Geography; Biology and Chemistry were neutral.

There were two episodes during my Grammar School career when I, too, was called to the office of Miss Pickup, our headmistress. Both of my transgressions were associated with absences from school without permission. The first was perhaps excusable. The whole school had been taken to the local theatre and concert hall, called the Winter Gardens, to see a matinee performance of 'Othello' by the Royal Shakespeare Company, no less! I was probably eleven, in the second form. It was my first exposure to Othello, although we had been prepared for it in English class, so we were familiar with the plot. Iago's deceitful intrigues as well as the injustice to Desdemona were more than I could bear. I did not want to witness Othello's unfair wrath, nor did I think I could tolerate the terrible misunderstandings that culminated in the conclusion of the last act. I decided that the school's wrath (if my absence were discovered) was more acceptable than Othello's and, during the intermission, I stole out of the theatre and went home. Next morning, at assembly, an announcement was made that the girl who had been seen on the Heysham bus at a certain time on the previous afternoon, was to report immediately to the headmistress. We wore school uniforms, so a Grammar School pupil who was misbehaving was easily identified and usually reported to the school leadership. I knocked on Miss Pickup's door with trepidation. Upon hearing my reasons, she was kind and although I was reprimanded, I received no concrete punishment. As an adult, I have often wondered if she was amused. My second transgression was worse. It too took place at the Winter Gardens but this time it was a quiz show that we had all followed on the radio, called, rather stupidly, 'Have a Go, Joe!' It was popular and, based on audience participation, it traveled from town to town. That week it was scheduled to take place in Morecambe, one day at lunch-time. Several of us had obtained permission to attend - at lunch-time. For some

reason, I decided I wanted to see the whole show, and unfortunately for me, it was not over before the beginning of afternoon school. I stayed and this time I was conspicuously absent from school without an excuse, without permission. Uncle Harry and Auntie Edna were summoned to school, this time to see the headmaster. I must have been forgiven once more, because I don't remember any drastic measures. I mention these episodes not only because they are amusing, but because the seriousness with which they were treated, at least in my mind, is so very different from the way children and even some parents tend to think about school discipline today.

During the war, the concert hall at the Winter Gardens in Morecambe was a very important center for cultural events. At Christmas, there would be pantomime performances for children and variety shows for the troops during the year.

What was most meaningful for me however was, that the famous Halle Orchestra with Sir Malcolm Sargent or Sir Adrian Bolt, came several times a year to Morecambe, as did the D' Oyley Carte Opera Company, the Royal Ballet and many famous solo singers like Richard Tauber and instrumentalists like Dames Eileen Fischer, Myra Hess and others. We would be taken to matinee performances from school (I mentioned the Royal Shakespeare Company) and if the performance was an orchestral concert, Mr. Palmer, our headmaster, who loved music and was an accomplished pianist, would prepare us, with demonstrations at the piano, for the compositions we would hear. One year the Halle Orchestra was to play Dvorak's New World Symphony. Not only did Mr. Palmer play and make us sing many of its themes, particularly the Largo, over and over again, but in the morning before the performance, he took me aside and said that he understood that this composition must have very special meaning for me, since Dvorak was also

living in a foreign country when he wrote it, and the music expressed his thoughts about his homeland. He hoped I would enjoy it, it was one of his, Mr. Palmer's, favorite symphonies. At the performance, during the opening tones of the second movement, his eyes met mine, he smiled and nodded. I have never forgotten him and - needless to say, whenever I hear the LargoI feel his kindness. Unfortunately, when I returned to England as an adult, after many years, I learned that he had died shortly before I had arrived. I owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

The war itself did not have a significant impact upon our lives as children because, as I have already mentioned, for some reason, the Nazis probably never discovered the Shell Oil Refinery, located in Heysham, and therefore we did not experience bombing. There were air raids, during which we would have to sleep in a little 'cloakroom' under the stairs of our bungalow. It was considered the safest place in the house and for us, it was more fun than frightening. We had blankets there and thermos flasks with hot tea and as soon as the 'all clear' sounded, we would be sent back to our own beds.

Uncle Harry, who was a conscientious objector and would not bear arms at any cost, for any reason, volunteered for the local fire service, called the Auxiliary Fire Service, or AFS for short. He was on duty several nights per week, and had to report to the station during air raids. Most important, he had a uniform, which was of enormous interest to Harry and his friends and sometimes they would be allowed to parade around the house and garden, wearing the hat which was navy blue with red trimming and had a visor above the forehead. Uncle Harry

was an avid reader. He would read four books per week, in spite of the fact that he was at work from early morning until after six in the evening. The five of us, Auntie Edna, Auntie Amy, Harry, Pat and I would have had tea around five o'clock in the afternoon (it was my job to set and clear the table). Uncle Harry ate his tea / dinner later, in his armchair so that he could read at the same time. He had constructed a dark brown wooden tray- table, without legs that was placed across the arms of the chair ; it had a hinged leaf in the middle, at eye level, that folded down when not in use, but served as a book rest so that he could read while he ate. After dinner he would listen to the news (we all did) then he would read until bedtime. Harry and I had to be in bed by seven, later I was allowed the privilege of staying up until eight. Bedtime was non negotiable, unless, as I have mentioned, there was an urgent school related issue like my speech from Julius Caesar. Once or twice a week, we would listen to dramatized classics on the radio which were produced as serials of six, eight or ten week duration, an hour at a time. In this way I learned not only to love David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, Great Expectations and many others, but also to recognize the voices of the magnificent actors who read the roles of the characters. I still maintain that good radio drama is among of the most satisfying forms of art. The images created during that impressionable time of my life have never left me, and what is more, when later, I saw some of these great works in the movie theatre, particularly those of Dickens, Shakespeare and Tolstoy, the scenes were almost exactly identical to the images I had created in my mind, initially through listening, later through reading.

The reason that I know that Uncle Harry read four books per week is as follows. There was a library on my bus route home from school. It was beyond our bus

stop, but all one had to do, was stay on the bus for three more stops. Once a week, Uncle Harry would take his four library books, return them and choose four new ones which he would leave at the library for me to pick up on my way home from school that day. The cycle was repeated every week. Sometimes, during the holidays, I would return the books too. Of course I would peek at the titles. He read everything, mostly non-fiction, from science, philosophy to engineering, (his field) to history and politics. The books were always thick, hard backed and heavy. How he managed to consume them all, I will never understand. His knowledge was enormous. He also had a great sense of humor and I loved to be teased by him.

One blustery, cold and rainy day, on my way to the library an event occurred that I have not only never forgotten, but that still makes me shiver whenever I think about it. I was perhaps eleven or twelve years old. It must have been during vacation, because I was standing at the bus stop, with four of Uncle Harry's books on my way to return them to the library and to pick up four newly selected ones. Suddenly a car stopped at the kerb next to the bus stop. A strange man stuck his head out of the window and asked me where I was going. I responded that I was going to the library and was waiting for the bus. The library was on his way, he said, and since the weather was so cold, windy and wet, he would be happy to give me a ride. I do not know what possessed me at that moment to accept. I had been taught and told thousands of times not only in England, in wartime which made for exceptionally dangerous situations, but also, as a little girl at home in Brno, never to speak to strangers, never to take treats or bribes from them and - even worse - never to accept a stranger's invitation to

accompany him or her on foot or in a car. Be that as it may, accept I did and even as I climbed into the front seat next to him, I realized my mistake and became afraid. He set out in the direction of the library and even before we approached it, I asked him to stop, I thought I should take the bus after all. He looked at me quite kindly and said, " But we're almost there." We arrived at the library and, although he slowed down, he did not stop. By then I was very anxious and told him we had passed the library and please would he let me out. He smiled and said he knew where the library was, he also knew what he was doing; he wanted to show me something. We drove on toward a relatively lonely and isolated part of Heysham (north of Morecambe) which was even more isolated in the inclement weather. No one was out, I saw no busses and few people in those days had cars. I was frantic and wondered whether I could try to open the door and somehow jump out. I begged him to let me out - anywhere, I just wanted to get away. I don't know how long we drove, it could have been just ten or fifteen minutes, it could have been thirty. It seemed like a lifetime. His face was no longer kind, it seemed grim and serious with lips pressed together in a thin line. Suddenly, without warning, he turned the car around, and resumed driving back in the direction from which we had come. A few minutes later he stopped at the kerb next to the library building and looked at me. "Are you scared?" he asked. I only nodded, I could not find my voice. " I did that to teach you a lesson", he said. "You should not have accepted my invitation. That was very silly of you. Don't ever go anywhere with a stranger again. You were very lucky this time. Don't ever forget!" He opened the door ,let me out and drove off. I will never know whether his initial intentions were criminal or whether he was truly interested in teaching a silly little girl a lesson. I told no one at home of my

adventure until I was an adult and came back to visit the Daniels family some eighteen years after it had happened.

Since food was scarce and rationed, and we lived near the ocean, fishing was a common occupation. However, Uncle Harry and Harry rarely fished with a rod. Our method and that of many of our neighbors consisted of 'setting' lines. This was made possible by the fact that Morecambe Bay (the half moon shaped shore where we lived) was characterized by a large difference of perhaps half a mile or more, between the ebb and flow of the daily tides. So Harry and I would be sent to the beach when the tide was out, with buckets and spades, to dig for worms. Needless to say it was far from our favorite occupation, but I have been able to handle and examine worms and similar creatures quite efficiently and without revulsion, ever since. The poor worms from the buckets would then be impaled upon hooks, the hooks tied at perhaps eighteen inch intervals onto long lines, with stakes at both ends of each line. We would go to the beach at low tide, set the stakes into the sand with the hooks hanging from the horizontal line between the stakes. One line might thus be perhaps twenty feet long and there might be three to four such lines. We would then go home, the tide would come in, the fish would bite and at low tide, we would return, to find fish on the hooks, some still flapping and struggling. That was the part I hated most and I would do anything to avoid going back to collect the catch of the day. Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes not, because we often went to the beach as a family. However, I don't think I ever had to actually remove the fish from the hooks. Uncle Harry mostly did that. To this day I hate fishing.

As we grew older, Uncle Harry would take Auntie Edna, Harry and me to the movies once a week on Saturday afternoons. He would choose what he thought would be suitable for us children and thus we saw Fantasia, many of the patriotic war films like Mrs. Minniver with Greer Garson, The Five Sullivans, many of the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers films, Madame Curie (also Greer Garson with Walter Pidgeon) musical films like The Seventh Veil with James Mason and Ann Todd, the greatest film version of Jane Eyre (then my favorite book) with Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine, and of course the classics. The Seventh Veil, in which Ann Todd played a concert pianist, featured Grieg's piano concerto and Rachmaninoff's second and I subsequently saw the film three more times. I fell in love with James Mason and felt tingling all over my body whenever he appeared on the screen. I suppose I was beginning to grow up. Gone With the Wind appeared at that time too. We were not allowed to see it, nor was I allowed to read the book. I did, of course, secretly, and could not for the life of me figure out why I was not supposed to read it until I was 'older'.

Uncle Harry's good will extended beyond taking care of me. It is well known that during the London Blitz, there was a general attempt to send at least the children of London to safety. They too were given labels around their necks, put on trains going north and at locations which were considered to be safe from the bombing, they would be met and taken in for varying periods of time, by the local population. Arrangements were made with the children's parents and in the majority of instances, the evacuees, as they became generally known, would be reunited with their families as soon as the situation was considered appropriate. Thus one day, we found ourselves at the Morecambe railway station where we were to meet our 'evacuee'. I had read in the paper and heard on the radio about

a diphtheria epidemic which was rampant among the children of London at the same time as the Blitz. As the train pulled in and we saw the children in groups on the platform, the term 'diphtheria' and 'Blitz' became synonymous in my mind, not because I misunderstood the words, I sort of knew what diphtheria was, but because of the appearance of the children. They were very pale, almost green and unhealthy looking, their faces were tear stained, their expressions afraid and bewildered. The labels around their necks did not add to the general dismay with which they regarded us. I was transported back to Victoria station on that August day in 1939, and suddenly I was happy and grateful that, this time I was one of 'us', and not one of 'them'. The name of 'our' evacuee was Mary. She had shoulder length blond hair which turned under at the ends, large green - blue eyes with dark rings under them and she was a year or so older than I. I tried to be friendly, after all we spoke the same language and she was in her own country, but she was so pathologically shy, that it was hardly possible for any of us, try as we might, to elicit more than monosyllabic answers from her. I must have given up, because I remember little about her stay with us. I think she attended school, and I know that her parents or relatives who, I think, were acquaintances of Uncle Harry's, eventually came to take her home. The length of her stay with our family is unclear to me.

A second visitor had more of an impact upon me, even though she was only with us for about three weeks during one Christmas vacation. Her name was Suzie and she, in contrast to Mary, was a refugee like me, a Jewish child from Europe. She lived in a boarding school for refugee children with several boys and girls, all from Europe. Uncle Harry must have been approached by the head of the school, asking whether he would be willing to take a child for a period of time, to

perhaps provide a change from the continuous school environment. Suzie was twelve and I was a year younger. Auntie Edna and I picked her up in Lancaster, the large city closest to Morecambe, where we sometimes went, by bus, to shop or on outings on the river. I don't know where Suzie's school was located, but I assume that they probably did not want her to have to change to the local Morecambe train on her own. I was very excited at the prospect of having a girl my age spend some time with us. She and I shared my bed and even though our difference in age was merely a year, it might as well have been ten. Suzie told me about her 'crushes' on some of the boys at the school, the rivalry between her and her girl friends for some of the more popular and 'sexy' boys (she could not believe that I had never heard the word) and she taught me how to think about 'taking' something I wanted, if I saw it in a store. She taunted me, particularly in the bakery where she would help herself to candy, which was rationed , and a popular bartering item between Harry and me, or at the green grocer's (produce store) where she would take apples and even the very scarce oranges. Somehow Uncle Harry and Auntie Edna found out about Suzie's ideas. I did not tell on her, but perhaps it was not difficult to recognize that this child, alone, without parents or parental supervision, like many others like her, had learned to fend for herself in somewhat less desirable ways than they wished for Harry or me. A correspondence ensued between Uncle Harry and Suzie's headmistress who, as I later learned, agreed rather sadly with Uncle Harry, and Suzie was shipped back to school as soon as Christmas vacation was over. It is possible, I even think there was some talk, that had Suzie not had a 'bad influence' on me, that, in the kindness of his heart, Uncle Harry might have considered keeping her too, for the duration of the war. I never heard any more about or from her.

have considered keeping her too, for the duration of the war. I never heard any more about or from her.

As the war and the years wore on, I became more and more an ordinary English school girl. I had completely forgotten my own languages, although in the fourth form we started taking German at school. I learnt with everyone else and did not find it familiar. Ever since I had been admitted to the Grammar School, I had become Renate Daniels, it was much more convenient, although very important documents, like some (not all) end of the year reports, did have both names on them. Mr. Palmer and Miss Pickup knew my real name. Not long after I had arrived in England, after my English became fluent, I started calling Auntie Edna and Uncle Harry, 'Mummy and Daddy'. My accent was pure Lancashire, not at all foreign and because I excelled in languages, French, Latin, German and in English as a subject, I was told that I would probably be a candidate for admission to Oxford or Cambridge.

For at least two years we had had no word from my parents. I dutifully continued to write the periodic twenty five word lettergrams and occasionally we would receive news from Canada from the Plačeks, from Grace Beaton from London or from more distant acquaintances that, 'some months ago', they had heard from someone who had heard from someone else that Miki and Nelly were alive and well. Such news was very sporadic and I must admit that, subconsciously and very gradually, I began to think of my life in England as stable and permanent. Occasionally, perhaps once a year, someone would come to our house and inquire about me. They may have been social workers or similar individuals from either the International Red Cross or perhaps War Resisters

International; they usually came in the afternoon, I would find them there when I came home from school. They would talk to Auntie Edna, ask me a few questions and leave. I don't know if that was part of the organizational system, perhaps they kept track of all the children from the Kindertransports. I do know that the Daniels family received absolutely no financial help from any of these agencies for my upkeep, education or anything else. I did have a scholarship for school and I think that helped, but that was for academic merit and had nothing whatsoever to do with economic aid. Once in a while, there would be Czech airmen who had joined the Royal Air Force, based in Morecambe. Somehow they would hear about me and come to visit. Unfortunately they were always greatly disappointed when they found that I could not understand a word of what they were saying to me and they would leave sadly shrugging their shoulders. This happened perhaps two times during the seven years.

Sad and incredible though it may seem, I do not remember the exact moment after the war, when I / we heard that my parents were alive and had survived the war. In the 1975 interview with Ruth Davis, my mother states that they sent a telegram as soon as it was logistically feasible. Accustomed as I was to my English life, I cannot write that I was disappointed, nor however, was I euphoric. I had never truly thought that they might not survive, since, at the time I was unaware of the reality of the concentration camps, and the fragments of news that had reached us about the fate of European Jews during the war, had been kept from me. All I knew was that my parents had moved to Slovakia and that the war had precluded any contact with occupied countries. After V.E. (Victory in Europe) Day, on May 9th 1945, newsreels at the movies began to show

documents from Auschwitz and other camps, but I did not see them. I considered the news that my parents were alive and well to be exciting and something to think about in the future, but somehow I did not digest it emotionally, not did I contemplate it seriously, as something that would drastically change my life. I continued to go to school, to study for end of term exams (I was in the fourth form), I planned bike rides and picnics with my friends. I was not quite fourteen and in the spirit of Scarlett O'Hara , whom I admired greatly, I glibly decided that I would "think about that tomorrow". I feel ashamed as I write this, but it is the purpose of this memoir to express and document our lives, thoughts and experiences as honestly and sincerely as is possible. Those are my true recollections of my reactions as the war ended. I did not remain indifferent for very long, and later, my feelings changed . My parents began to write to us immediately of course, and each time, I had to be reminded to write back. Those initial letters described in stilted, childishly repetitive phrases, my every day life at school and at home. There is little doubt in my mind that my correspondence as an eight year old child had been more thoughtful, considerate of my parents and emotionally mature, than the forced, artificial little messages I sent as an almost fourteen year old in the spring of 1945. I do not know whether my parents noticed this or whether any word from me, however empty and meaningless, was so precious and welcome within the context of their situation, that they hardly noticed the content . I would like to think and hope that it was the latter.

Later that fall, as I entered the fifth form, my parents mentioned that they were beginning to think about coming to visit us. Eventually, it was my mother who came alone. They had of course discussed the possibility of her bringing me

home with her and, once again, my father left the decision up to her. In 1945 and 1946, many theoretical options existed. My parents could have decided to join me and emigrate to England. They had received (or would shortly receive) an affidavit from a paternal cousin of my mother's, Edith Rose, who lived in New York, a very generous gesture on her part, for all three of us; an affidavit was a document guaranteeing financial protection for immigrants so that they would not become dependent upon the welfare of the government of the United States. My parents even contemplated the option of leaving me in England, if they thought it would be to my benefit and visiting me periodically. There were friends, including the Pláček^ůs, in Canada, and finally the possibility of Palestine was present in everyone's mind at that time, except mine. Together they decided that Nelly would assess the situation in England and Miki would, characteristically, agree with whatever conclusion she reached. He knew, he said, that she would make the best decision for all of us.

I cannot imagine their feelings, particularly Nelly's, as they prepared for her trip. Nothing was available in war ravaged Czechoslovakia and, although Mitzi had managed to salvage some of their furniture and other household items, Nelly needed warm clothes, underwear, shoes, stockings and of course money not only for the trip, but also for associated costs (a euphemism for bribes) in obtaining a passport and other necessary documents. I don't know how they accomplished all this, I assume some of Mitzi's and perhaps Nelly's jewelry (Mitzi had succeeded in hiding a few pieces from the Nazis) was sacrificed, nothing was ever discussed. By the beginning of 1946, we knew that her visit was imminent, although no date had been set. I felt excited, albeit intermittently. I imagined the family's trip to Lancaster to meet her train but had no visions

beyond that. We had sent school photographs of Harry and me, so I assumed she would recognize us. Would I recognize her? In February several arrival dates were mentioned, but each was canceled in the last minute. Telegrams were exchanged back and forth, I am not even sure that I was aware of all of them. My mother later explained that each of those dates was realistic. With characteristic perseverance and, I assume, her personal charm, she became the first post war private civilian to obtain permission to travel by air, from Prague to London, but since there was no regular civilian time table, it was not possible, even for the airport authorities, to predict a precise time or day of departure. As a result, she spent several days and nights at Prague airport, waiting to board one of the military planes at a moment's notice. She maintained constant contact with my father during those days, and it was he who was in charge of dispatching the telegrams, notifying us that she was or was not arriving.

So it was, that early one cold weekday morning at the beginning of March, we were all sitting in front of the fire, eating breakfast, when we heard a knock on the window. It was a large bay window, to our right, as we sat facing the fire; Uncle Harry's arm chair, with his 'reading - tray - table', was nearest to it. The first to react, he jumped up and exclaimed, "Crikey, it's Nelly!"

My own first unforgettable impression was that of a smiling face, at the right side of the window, in a brown hat, with a gap between her two front teeth. Hers was of my large cloud of black hair ("Too much hair," she commented long afterwards). My next memory is of the confusion of the arrival. First she was inside the living room, in Uncle Harry's arms, then she turned to me and somehow, although I did not react overtly, I knew that all the feelings of the past

almost seven years were there, expressed in her bright, questioning eyes, as she came toward me. I could not hug her, I owed that much to Edna, and, instinctively, I think my mother understood. She kissed me, then turned to hug Auntie Edna and Harry. The next thing I remember is running outside to catch my friend, Alec Lamb, the red haired boy who lived up the road and was in my form at school, to ask him to excuse my absence for that day because my mother had arrived. He nodded, looked at me, said nothing and walked on toward our bus stop. I liked Alec and remember feeling disappointed at his apparently indifferent reaction to what I considered to be quite momentous news.

I wish my mother could read this, or that we could at least have discussed it while she was alive, because for her, the visit which lasted a month, was not only a complete disaster, but an unanticipated and unexpectedly sad anticlimax to seven years of hopes and dreams. She remembered it as my rejection of her, my reluctance to express affection or even to acknowledge her as my mother. One evening, as we were all sitting around the fire again, I spontaneously said, "Mummy..." (I don't remember what I wanted to say). Both she and Edna looked up simultaneously. All three of us were embarrassed and although I noticed the tears in my mother's eyes, and instinctively I wanted to touch her, I did not have the courage.

In the interview of 1975, Nelly describes my estrangement as natural and understandable. She even thought she understood and explained my feelings toward Auntie Edna. What she did not understand and what she never knew, was my confusion. I wanted to hug her, I wanted to comfort her (and myself), but I was afraid of Auntie Edna, I was embarrassed and I did not know how. I

didn't know where my loyalties lay. After all, she was a foreigner (and weren't we all supposed to look down upon foreigners?) she had a strong accent, you could "cut it with a knife" Auntie Edna said . When she tried to help in the kitchen or in the bakery store where Edna worked during the war, - she was a trained baker and confectioner, it took Nelly forever to bake biscuits (cookies) or a cake. The women in the bakery, familiar with the equipment and their methods of doing things, laughed at this 'foreign lady with an accent' who had probably 'never done anything for herself in her life'. They had heard from Edna that we had had ' a servant' when I was little, so it was not surprising that it took her a whole morning to bake a batch of biscuits while they watched with amusement and at the same time churned out hundreds of loaves of bread. I felt my mother's humiliation but to my shame, I smiled politely as I listened to Edna's descriptions of my mother's 'clumsiness' as she tried so hard to make herself useful in the alien environment of a strange house in a strange country, with a stranger for a daughter.

My mother attempted to approach both Harry and me in a sensitive and careful way. For example she asked to take us for walks, she shopped with us for treats or little surprises and wondered if in Morecambe, there were any little cafes or ice cream places, like there were in Europe before the war, where the three of us could sit down together, have some dessert and talk. I was quite willing to participate in such outings, Harry was not interested. Auntie Edna was working, so my mother decided that perhaps she (and I when I was at home) should try and prepare the evening meals before everyone came home. These too, were quite unsuccessful endeavors. I honestly cannot begin to imagine how miserable

that whole month must have been for her. I know she informed my father that if they were ever to regain their daughter, she must come home, now, immediately, without delay. She feared that already I was lost to them.

About two weeks after she had arrived, my mother, Auntie Edna and I were invited to meet Mr. Palmer and Miss Pickup at school. In her interview my mother told Ruth Davis that no one at school had known that I was not the Daniels' biological child, that I was not born in England; in fact it was her impression that the school knew nothing about my background. This was not the case. My mother, in her pain, was mistaken. I have already mentioned Mr. Palmer's comments to me about music and Dvořák etc. Some of the teachers were also interested in my story and occasionally would ask me to stay behind at the end of a class and ask about my parents, whether I had news of them etc. There were also perhaps two families who periodically invited me to spend my lunch hour with them and their daughters who were my classmates, at their homes. Both families were from London and were staying in Morecambe during the war. As an adult, I have often wondered about their interest in me, both the mothers were exceptionally kind and liked to hear me talk about my memories of home. I have never had contact with any of my classmates since I left England. So people did know, even though my mother thought otherwise. I always remember how Mr. Palmer told my mother that I was a 'student' and would go far academically. I felt deeply disappointed at the way he thought of me. That term I had just been accepted into one of the school's netball teams (netball is like basketball but with seven players on each side) and I would have much preferred to have been described as a talented sportsperson than by the derogatory term 'student'. He also informed my mother that I would probably qualify for a position

at Oxford or Cambridge and that she and my father should think very seriously about allowing me to stay in England. It was Mr. Palmer and Miss Pickup who convinced my mother at least to allow me to complete the 1946 school year in Morecambe, because in July, we were to take our School Certificate (the national test which, in Britain at that time indicated the completion of the lower half of a grammar school education). It was the equivalent of the current 'O' levels. If I did well, they said, I would have achieved at least a certain milestone and could resume a British education if I ever wanted to. My mother was concerned about the continuing burden for the Daniels family, but there was no question that they wanted me to stay as long as possible. I know that, had my parents not survived, they would have adopted me. That night, after we had returned home from the school visit, I was in the bathroom, leaning over the tub preparing Harry's bath water, when my mother joined me there. She said she had thought about what Mr. Palmer had said about my at least finishing the school year so that I could take my School Certificate. She had decided that I could stay until the end of July, she knew my father would agree and then I would come home to Brno and begin the next school year there. I stood up and, for the first time, I hugged her. She interpreted the gesture as one of gratitude on my part, for permission to stay in England and she relayed this rather sadly, with tears in her eyes, during the 1975 interview. Again, this was not the case and I regret not having had the opportunity to make amends or at least to explain. My reaction was spontaneous. It occurred during one of our first intimate moments alone together ; furthermore, in my mind, I had decided that this was my own mother and I did not need to feel embarrassed if I hugged her; some of my friends from school also embraced their mothers and I had always felt a little envious of their mutual closeness.

Nelly stayed until the end of March. She had an old friend who lived in Scotland, named Lisa Schwansee (she had changed her name to Swansea) and during my mother's stay, she came to Morecambe for a short reunion and visit with her. I think they had been classmates and the visit gave them both a great deal of pleasure as well as much sadness because Lisa's whole family had remained in Europe and been wiped out.

After Nelly's departure, my feelings were ambivalent. She left a void as well as a bond. The stress and tension of her visit was relieved, yet I thought with admiration of this woman who had understood my reticence so sensitively and had not forced herself upon me. I thought with sadness of the short three and a half months that remained of my old familiar school routine and home life, yet I sensed with some excitement that my new future in Brno would be interesting. I began receiving letters from Jirí, in perfect English, reminding me of our childhood together, at the same time inviting me to practice the piano, so that we could play duets together. My parents' letters also became more personal, my mother remembered every little episode from her brief encounter with us and referred to my friends as well as Harry's and Auntie Edna's by name, asking and writing about them with interest. In general, however, I would have preferred not to have to leave England and as my departure drew nearer, I needed some justification.

Harry and I had attended a Christian Science Sunday School. There was no Quaker meeting house in Morecambe and Uncle Harry decided that the Christian Science philosophy resembled that of the Quakers most closely. I must admit

that as an adult, I was surprised at Uncle Harry's opinion, Quaker philosophy is quite significantly different from and more rational than that of the Christian Scientists and the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy, their founder. Uncle Harry himself did not attend, but I suppose that he wanted us to have some basic religious education, so that is where he sent us. Christian Scientists believe that disease and other evil is a state of mind and that deep faith together with prayer will cure all evil. They do not believe in the science of medicine, nor do they seek medical help. I decided that since I had to return to Czechoslovakia, it was upon me to spread the teachings of Christian Science to the population there. I felt better once I had outlined a mission for my life in Brno. I equipped myself with Mary Baker Eddy's book, *Science and Health*, and collected additional literature as well. As the time drew nearer for the school certificate examinations, I studied quite hard, but, as mentioned before, I hated physics. The evening before the physics exam, I realized that I was not well prepared. At Sunday School we had learned that fear, too, was a form of evil, to be overcome by faith and prayer. So I paid a visit to two sisters, the Misses Montague, who had both taught us in Sunday School and asked them in all seriousness, to pray for me tomorrow please, from eight until two thirty, for the duration of the exam. They did and I passed; not very well, but at least I did not fail! My faith was affirmed but, needless to say, once I arrived in Brno, my missionary zeal evaporated completely.

School continued in those days, into July, so after the exams ended, there were just two weeks left until my departure. Again, I had a 'last' birthday, this time my fifteenth, again I said goodbye to all my friends. Once more I found myself receiving and giving little goodbye presents and, although it was not exactly a

feeling of déjà vu, I sometimes thought I was reliving an old dream. Parting from Harry was the hardest. I don't think we allowed ourselves to talk or even think about the future. And indeed, exactly one year later, in the summer of 1947, he showed up on our doorstep in Brno for the vacation of a lifetime. He had had the option of going to France with his school ; instead he chose to come and visit me.

Uncle Harry accompanied me to London where we spent some four days together. He showed me around and I cannot think of a more knowledgeable, more entertaining or amusing guide. We finally met Grace Beaton in person and at her house I saw my first television set. It was a huge, tall rectangular box with a tiny screen at the top. That's all I remember about it. Miss Beaton herself was just as kind and genteel as I had always imagined her. As for Uncle Harry, I still owe him a posthumous apology, even though on many subsequent occasions, I tried to explain, what turned out to be a stupid mistake on my part . On our last day together, I could no longer bear the tension of our upcoming parting, so I said, "I suppose you'll be glad to get rid of me!" It was meant in the same spirit in which we had teased and bantered with one another over all the years, it was honestly meant as a joke. But this time Uncle Harry was not in a joking mood. He stopped (we were walking along) he turned to face me, grabbed me by my shoulders and asked me very seriously whether I really thought that he wanted me to leave, that he, Auntie Edna and Harry no longer wanted me with them. By then I was almost in tears and although I repeated over and over again that I had been joking, I don't think he ever believed me. Even when I returned to England as an adult, with my own children, much, much later,

he would occasionally refer to that last day and ask, " So you still think we wanted to get rid of you, do you?" Dear Uncle Harry, I am so sorry!

The flight to Prague was in the afternoon of August 1st 1946, seven years to the day, since I had left home. In the days before jets, the flight from London to Prague took four hours. I was put into the care of a Mrs. Bricker whose seat was next to mine. The poor lady spent the whole time searching through her hand baggage and rummaging through her purse. Occasionally she enlisted my help in looking for the object that at that particular moment she could not find. I felt as if our caretaking roles had been reversed but it was also disturbing to me. I had looked forward to the four hour flight as an opportunity finally to collect my thoughts, to think deeply about what was happening to me and to try to understand. Mrs. Bricker's agitation precluded all that.

We arrived in Prague toward evening and there was my father, looking like I remembered him. His dear face was somewhat thinner, the familiar wrinkles somewhat deeper but, apart from his front teeth which had been damaged by a blow to the mouth, he appeared unchanged. Mitzi was also there, elegant as always, in a silk dress, hat, with gloves and shoes to match (a sine qua non for her) and as she enveloped me in her warm embrace, I suddenly became aware of the familiar smell combining expensive perfume and cigarettes. Even though I hadn't realized that its memory had remained with me, I knew immediately that this was the smell of home. Neither Miki nor Mitzi thought that they spoke English well enough (between them they spoke at least six languages) so, with them at the airport, was Robert Pláček who happened to be in Prague on business from Canada and a young lady, whose name was Eli

Weigl, a friend who had worked for the Pláček^ůs as a foreign correspondent and, like Robert, spoke English perfectly. We spent two days in Prague during which I was treated like a princess. We stayed at my father's favorite hotel, Hotel Paris, went out to eat, (I stuffed myself with Wiener Schnitzel and cucumber salad) we swam in the Vltava again, visited the Barrandov film studios, ate ice cream . Miki and Robert made business calls and I rode in the car with them. In the afternoon of the second day, on August 3rd, we took the train to Brno where my mother, Auntie Ilse and Jiří were waiting for us on the platform. Jiří was holding a dozen red roses. My image of myself, as English royalty, was complete.

We came home to my parents' new apartment, I was shown my room and there stood a little table near the window, piled high with presents. There were flowers everywhere. I could not believe that they were all for me. As I began to unwrap some of the packages, my mother stood beaming with my father's arm around her shoulders. He was saying, "No, no, Maminko moje drahá, už se uklidni! Konečně ji máme doma!" ("There, there, my dearest Mommy, calm down now. She's home at last!")

RENATA POLGAROVA

The honeymoon lasted for another two weeks. It was a whirlwind of hairdressers ('too much hair') dressmakers, swimming and hiking outings, introductions and reunions. The overriding question however was my future education. In British terms, I had completed the most important part of my secondary education, namely the fifth form which culminated with the 'School Certificate'. It was a milestone which enabled those individuals who wished, to leave school and either seek employment or to attend certain types of professional schools. Those who were interested in academic careers and university, as I was, would stay on for another two years, in the Lower and Upper Sixth Forms. They were required to study only four or five subjects, the ones in which they intended to specialize at university. At the end of the Upper Sixth, they would take the then Higher School Certificate, now A.(Advanced) Levels in those subjects and, depending on the results, apply for university admission. In Europe on the other hand, Czechoslovakia included, secondary education consisted of eight, not seven, years, the last of which, the eighth, culminated in the so-called 'maturity' or Baccalauréat examination, given at the end of that year. Preparation for it began theoretically in the fifth year, i.e. at around age fifteen, so that 'maturity' could be attained around age eighteen. The four years of preparation consisted not of four selected specialized subjects, but of an excellent well rounded education which included Maths, the sciences, as well as the social sciences, languages etc. Depending on the results of the final examination, a candidate was then qualified to apply for admission to a university of his or her choice. It is my understanding that, in principle, this is still the case in many European countries today.

My parents were adamant that I receive an excellent education. It was all they could give me, they said, and no one could ever take it away from me. There were even some individuals in the concentration camps, whose lives were spared because they had special skills and who themselves had been able to save the lives of others. It is possible that even at that stage, my father in particular, was dreaming about a career in medicine for me, not because he was especially ambitious, but because of his conviction that medicine was an international, ubiquitously accepted and necessary profession. After all they had been through, it is probable that their view of the future, like that of many survivors, was influenced by the need to provide their children with the tools that, should the need arise, would enable them to survive too. Nothing was further from my own mind than medicine, pharmacology (another of my father's gentle suggestions) or any other science related subject whatsoever. I was the 'language' person, remember? There was a school in Prague at the time, called the 'English School' where all subjects were taught in English, its goal to produce graduates who were fluent in English. That was my school of choice. Failing that, and I suspected that my parents were not about to send me to Prague for the school year, since I had just returned from seven years of separation, I knew that there was an identical school in Brno, except instead of English, the tuition there was in French. I would not have to learn Czech; I truly couldn't understand a word. Furthermore, I probably would not have to work very hard on subjects that I did not like, like geography, physics, chemistry etc., since the emphasis was on French and I already knew a lot of that, having had five years of it in England. My problem was solved. It was the English school for me, or second best, the French one.

My parents would have none of it. Again, like many Europeans , they insisted that languages were a necessity. Everyone had to be able to speak more than one language. After all hadn't president Masaryk written somewhere that the more languages you spoke, the more worlds were open to you ? They conceded that they were pleased that I was interested in languages. However, as a profession, languages were useless. They were an indispensable tool but never a finished product. I would be enrolled in a good general Czech secondary school, a 'gymnasium', and I would study everything there until, after completion and graduation, I would be old enough to make sensible and practical decisions about a university career. I protested, I was disappointed, I was apprehensive. They listened but they remained consistent. They also maintained, rightly as it turned out, but of course I didn't believe them, that the best and easiest way for me to learn Czech would be at school, with youngsters my own age. It was my mother, as always, who took the initiative. Once she had decided which were the best schools in Brno, she set about enrolling me.

This was easier said than done. She began systematically, by visiting each of the schools, but as soon as she mentioned that her daughter had recently arrived home from England and could not speak Czech, the principals were not interested. What could they do with a student who could not speak the language, they asked. They could not even give her an entrance test. My mother responded that all she asked was that initially, they allow me to sit in class and listen; she thought I would learn quickly. She even thought that the language might come back to me, if I were given the opportunity to become immersed in it. They shook their heads; they could not bend the rules; their hands were tied;

the school board would not permit such an exception. My mother would come home from these interviews, shaking her head, discouraged and incredulous. September 1st, the beginning of the school year, was approaching rapidly. Friends, Manya, who visited regularly, even Mitzi and many others all recommended that I remain at home for a year, learn Czech and reapply in a year's time, as a regular student. I was still hoping for at least the French school as a last resort. But Nelly's mind was made up. She was going to find a school that would accept me and she would not take 'no' for an answer.

One of the schools she had not yet visited was among those with the best reputation. For some reason, it was also among the last ones on her visiting itinerary. When she returned home that day, her eyes were shining and she 'had fallen in love', she said. The headmaster, Mr. Schroller, an elderly, white haired, distinguished appearing gentleman, a classics scholar, had listened to her story, and for the first time since she had begun these school visits, she had observed a spark of interest in his facial expression. When she finished, he introduced her to his colleague, one of the professors of chemistry, Dr. Krejčí. Dr. Krejčí was warm, welcoming and told my mother that he, too, had survived the camps. What Nelly found so very meaningful was, that she had mentioned nothing at all about the camps, the war, her own or my father's experience. All she had told the Headmaster, and in turn he had transmitted to Dr. Krejčí, was the identical story she had repeated so many times to the other headmasters, namely that she had a fifteen year old daughter who had returned from England where she had spent the war and had forgotten her own language.

The two men had been sensitive and understanding. Without hesitation, they agreed to accept me; I would enter the fifth class and would participate in

whatever subjects I could, like mathematics, Latin, English of course, art, gym etc. and listen to the rest. I would take no tests or examinations until the end of the first half year which was at the end of January. My situation would be reassessed at that time. They had a good English department, they said, and they knew that the teachers of English would be eager to help me. I would, in essence, repeat the fifth year, since I had already completed the fifth form in England. This was considered beneficial. First I had always been a year younger than my classmates and this would give me a chance to catch up in age, but more importantly, the content would be different, the preparation for the final examinations in the eighth year began in the fifth and if, by chance, there were repetition of familiar material, it would only benefit my learning of the language. All this was discussed during that first visit with my mother, before they had even met me. I would start with all the other students on the first day of the school year.

The Third Gymnasium in Brno (its official name) was a wonderful school, with excellent teachers, liberal and progressive principles. I was happy there. By the end of the first semester, in January 1947, I took a chemistry test, as well as math and physics and received several grades. I was given a written history test, with Czech questions and was allowed to answer in English. Our English mistress who was also our home room teacher translated my answers into Czech, so it was possible to award me a grade in history too. I began to write Czech essays, initially very simple ones, later, with the help of an older student, assigned to me by the school, they became a little more advanced. In English class, I would be tested in reverse (I would have to know the Czech translation for English vocabulary and phrases). Everyone was extremely helpful and

understanding. By the end of my first year at home, I had become a regular student. By the end of my second, i.e. as I completed the sixth grade, my grade point average was good.

Unfortunately, this wonderful school and its leadership would pay dearly for its liberal philosophies, once the communist dictatorship became a reality. Dr. Krejčí would be one of the first of several to 'disappear' without trace. Dr. Schroller was replaced as headmaster during my last year and, worst of all, our class was the last to graduate. The school was closed in the summer of 1950 and some twelve of my classmates, ten boys and two girls, were arrested shortly after graduation, for 'subversive activities as enemies of the regime'. We never found out what 'crimes' against the communists they had committed. It was rumored that they had printed and distributed anti - communist leaflets. They remained in prison for several years, two of them later died in their thirties or forties, under mysterious circumstances. The lives of the rest were ruined. The building is still a school, but it never became a secondary or high school again. It reopened subsequently, as a middle level technical school and that is what it has remained. I have often wondered whether any of the students who attend today, are even aware of the events that occurred in their building some fifty years ago.

My first school year at home ended uneventfully. I had relearned Czech and, by osmosis, was beginning to understand German. I had made some friends at school and am still in touch with some of them. Manya was a loyal and faithful friend and although she no longer lived with us, she remained a cherished

member of our family; periodically, she even helped with my Czech essays and homework.

Jiří and I were still close and our greatest pleasure together were our bicycles, a present to each of us from Auntie Ilse. A widow now, she was living in Prague and working as a surgical nurse at the university clinic. She was a sensitive and insightful listener and took a great interest in our activities. Jiří and I skated together, he reintroduced me to opera, we lived across the street from the theatre and tickets were inexpensive. We attended concerts and lectures, and we philosophized about life like most teenagers. We played four handed piano together, although I was by far the inferior player; he also played cello and composed music. He wrote a 'Fantasia for cello and piano' which he dedicated to me. What I did not know at the time, was that Jiří was experiencing serious conflicts in his life. I knew what was going on, but somehow in my adolescent selfishness I took it for granted and neither questioned, nor thought about it too much; my life was too full and too busy. His situation was as follows. As the son of a woman who had been accused of associating with the Germans during the war, and who probably (although I am uncertain about that) still maintained her German nationality, Jiří was not allowed to attend a Czech secondary school or gymnasium. He was enrolled in evening classes about which he and his friend Peter told amusing anecdotes and stories; the other attendees were a mixed bunch of adults who were catching up on their basic education, some war veterans and other 'shady' (Jiří's word) characters like he and Peter who, in the eyes of the school boards, had dubious previous histories. As a result of this situation, Jiří was mostly free and available during the day and if I happened to

have a free study hour, he would meet me and we would spend many happy fifty minute periods in the nearby parks.

Perhaps I might be permitted to mention what might be considered an interesting psychological observation about my relationship with my parents. My father was his usual, consistent, gentle quiet self, always ready to listen, interested in my activities, but it seemed to me that he was happy for me to take the initiative in the renewal of our previous closeness. My mother faced a much more difficult situation. She was aware that she was dealing with an immature daughter in puberty, whom she did not have the advantage of knowing intimately. However it was not in her nature to wait until I was ready to approach her, I think she needed to feel in control of my adolescence, she ached to be my confidante. Initially she was not, and, as a result, we clashed on several occasions, usually after she found out that I had again spent time with Jiří during the day, without her knowledge. One day, after one of these rather loud interactions between the two of us, I yelled, " You are my *own* mother, not someone else's, and I can share and not share whatever I want with you!!" My mother was appalled at this sudden outburst. What she did not know, was that this was the result, on my part, of years of not daring to express a controversial opinion to my foster mother, of years of responding politely, in exactly the way I thought I was expected to respond, and of wishing that I could express my views and thoughts as freely as my friends in England were allowed to express theirs to their *own* mothers. For seven years, I had craved to be free to raise my voice to my mother and I decided that now was the time to begin. To be honest, it was probably just an experiment on my part. But I felt compelled to try it and was curious as to the reaction I would encounter.

Correspondence with the Daniels family continued throughout that first school year and as the end of the spring term approached, it was decided that Harry would come to spend the summer with us in Brno. As mentioned previously, his school was planning a trip to France but Harry elected to come to Czechoslovakia. The family had moved to the south of England, to Grays in Essex. We learned later that although the move had been associated with Uncle Harry's work, they had welcomed it, in the hope that it would help Harry cope with the sadness of my departure. Auntie Edna recalled that he lost weight, was not interested in school and wished that I could come back. So when the opportunity arose for a visit, he seized it enthusiastically. My parents, for their part, were delighted. Although they were aware that they could never begin to repay the Daniels family for saving my life, they saw Harry's vacation with us as their first opportunity to at least begin to express their gratitude. As it turned out, a little boy of thirteen flying on his own from England to Czechoslovakia, just two years after the end of the war, was quite a sensation. Both Harry and his parents were interviewed by a newspaper before his departure, and his picture as well as his story and that of his 'big sister' was published. We still have the clipping. It was by no means a routine occurrence and Harry was put under the care of the employees of Baťa, a Czech shoe making firm, the owner of which had emigrated to England during or before the war and was now reestablishing himself in his homeland. The company, called Airlink, also belonged to Baťa and as far as I know, the other passengers were friendly, entertaining and Harry enjoyed their attention and his flight.

As an aside, it might be interesting to note that Mr. Baťa was a capitalist of the best kind. Before the war, he had built a whole city in Moravia for his employees, called Zlín. It consisted of individual one family brick houses with small gardens, parks, cultural centers and other facilities. It resembled a modern day kind of Utopia. His department stores were state of the art glass high rises which sold shoes, boots, rubber goods and always had a characteristic smell. The shoes were well made and inexpensive and he had established several such stores in England as well as in Canada during the war. They exist to this day. The large glass store windows were to play an important role under the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, after Baťa had once more flown into exile, but that will be described later.

Harry was met at Prague airport by my mother and Auntie Ilse. Thus began his sensational vacation. If I was treated like a princess as I returned from England, Harry was treated like a lord. Indeed that is what we called him - 'the little lord'. His every wish was granted, he was showered with presents, which included a bicycle (Auntie Ilse) a soccer ball, many others. A special event was planned for every day of his six week stay. We laughed, as he woke up every morning, asking, "So what's happening today?" He was fed so much ice cream, apricot dumplings and other favorite foods that occasionally he would throw up and my mother (Auntie Nelly) would lovingly clean him up, find fresh clothes and feed him more. He flew home reluctantly at the end of the summer and it was immediately decided that next summer he would return with both parents. That was the summer of 1948, after the communist take-over in February of that year. The family came for three weeks and although Auntie Edna and Uncle Harry enjoyed themselves immensely - my family once more concentrated every effort on expressing their gratitude, for Harry the vacation was somewhat less

momentous, because some of the activities were directed toward the entertainment of his parents, rather than solely toward his, now fourteen year old, interests. Despite the communist government, that summer of 1948, in the observant eyes of Uncle Harry, still promised hope and optimism, that the Czechoslovak Republic would regain its prewar cultural and industrial standards.

The family returned eight years later, in the summer of 1956. They were able to attend my graduation from medical school and spend a week in the Tatra mountains with us. The difference in the standard of living that they observed, the deterioration of the country, the neglect, the drab greyness prevalent everywhere was all the more obvious to them, because they had experienced the spirit of renewal and rebuilding which had prevailed throughout the country during their first visit eight years previously. We ourselves were of course aware of the situation also, but gradual destruction and deterioration is less noticeable if experienced on a daily basis, than when it is encountered suddenly, after a considerable lapse of time. Uncle Harry refused to visit the country, ever again. Harry on the other hand, later with his wife Els, spent several more vacations with us. Each time we made an effort to make them as enjoyable as possible, usually taking advantage of those aspects of life within our country that had remained more or less intact, namely its natural beauty (at least in part) its historic architecture and traditions in classical music. We took Harry and Els skiing and hiking in the mountains, and to concerts and the theatre in Prague and Brno.

On February 25th 1948, there was a huge rally on Wenceslas Square in Prague, attended by thousands of 'exploited' workers and laborers. It had been instigated

and organized by the Communist party who shortly before, had staged what became known as the Communist putsch. It signified the end of Masaryk's democratic republic, the end of freedom, progress and development. It was the beginning of a totalitarian dictatorship under Stalin. Its direction was downward, its philosophy suppressive, the color a monotonous gray and our language acquired multitudes of ungrammatical meaningless phrases.

BIG BROTHER

Thus began the third era of suppression of the Czech nation: the first which ended the glorious history of the Husites at the Battle of the White Mountain in Bohemia in 1620, resulted in three hundred years of dependence upon the Habsburg dynasty. After 1918, the young republic had been in existence for one month less than twenty years at the time of the Munich agreement. From February 1948, the communists would retain power for the next two times twenty years, with one brief period of hope, now known as The Prague Spring, exactly in the middle, in the spring of 1968, when Alexander Dubček attempted to introduce "Communism with a human face".

What the population and most of the post-war government did not know, was that Czechoslovakia had fallen on the Soviet side of a line, drawn through the center of Europe, by The Big Three, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, at the Teheran and Yalta conferences, before the war ended. It was not only agreed that the liberation of Czechoslovakia would come from the east, but the agreement was honored by the Allies to such an extent, that many thousands of lives were lost unnecessarily, also during the Prague uprising of May 5th 1945. It is now clear that General Patton had offered to advance from the west, but his army had been halted artificially in Pilsen. They were prepared and equipped to liberate Prague, just sixty miles away. According to the agreement however, Prague (and with it the whole country) belonged to the Red Army and its citizens had to wait for the Soviets to reach the capital, four days later, on May 9th. For forty years we were taught and indoctrinated about the betrayal of the western forces who could, but elected not to help Prague. It was the heroic Red

Army who saved the lives of their Czech brothers. It was they, the Great Working People of the Soviet Union, and their commander, Comrade Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, to whom we owed our gratitude, our lives , our country, our property, our loyalty, our privacy, our marriages, our children, our bodies and our brains. The individual was nothing. The collective was everything.

One of the few individuals who was aware of this before it actually took place, was Jan Masaryk, the revered son of the first president, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk. He spent the war years in London, with President Benes and the exiled government and, for six years, his weekly radio broadcasts, "London Calling" ("Volá Londýn" in Czech). They were preceded by the well known first two bars of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which symbolized a 'V' for victory (dot, dot, dot, dash) in Morse code. He gave hope to millions of his countrymen as they listened secretly to his words of encouragement, news from the front and humorous anecdotes about the enemy. He was a gregarious, witty man, a good pianist and immensely popular among British wartime political society, a friend of the Kennedys at the time when Joe Kennedy Sr. was the US Ambassador to Britain. In his capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs in exile, Jan Masaryk, or Honza, as he was affectionately known, had accompanied President Benes to Moscow in March 1945 and been present during the fateful negotiations about the future of Czechoslovakia. He knew that the days of his father's tolerant, highly democratic system of government were numbered, as were those of his colleagues in the western oriented Cabinet. After the February 25th putsch, the leadership of the country was taken over by Klement Gottwald, a hard core communist who, together with a group of equally illiterate and alcohol addicted comrades, had spent the war years in Moscow. Edward Beneš resigned, as did

most of the London component of his government. Klement Gottwald was 'elected' unanimously, by acclamation, to the chair of the communist party and automatically became the republic's third president. Jan Masaryk did not resign from the foreign ministry, nor did he move out of the building which housed it, namely the Czernin Palace (pronounced 'Cherneen') where he usually stayed. In the early morning hours of March 10th 1948, just fourteen days after the take-over, he was found dead in the courtyard, beneath one of the bathroom windows of the palace. The mystery of his death remains unsolved to this day. To my knowledge, neither murder nor suicide has been conclusively ruled out, even though the subject became an official topic of intense investigation during the brief period of the Prague Spring in 1968. Unofficially, it still occupies the minds of some journalists, private individuals and surviving personal friends. Klement Gottwald could hardly contain his glee, when, some time later, he announced that the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, would be assumed by Alexej Čepička, Gottwald's son - in - law.

The first noticeable effect of the change in government was yet another exodus of several groups within the population of Czechoslovakia. This time, it was not predominantly the Jewish population who was in danger, but many intellectuals, outspoken journalists, writers, Czech patriots, well known artists and musicians, wealthy factory owners, supporters of the capitalist system, whose perspicacity enabled them to see that the way of life to which they had been accustomed, had come to an abrupt end. So for example, I remember attending Rafael Kubelík's opera 'Veronika' at the Brno theatre, sometime in 1948. It was conducted by the composer himself, one of his last performances in his beloved homeland. He became a famous, much sought after conductor and performed all

over the world. While he almost always added a Czech composition, by Smetana, Dvořák or Janáček etc. to his program, sometimes at least in the form of an encore, he did not conduct in Czechoslovakia again for the next forty one years. He returned to lead the Czech Philharmonic in a moving performance of *Má Vlast* (My Country) by Smetana during the Prague Spring of 1990, shortly before his death in 1991???(Check,R.L.!!) The famous actors, satirists, stars of the 'Liberated Theatre' (Osvobozené divadlo) in Prague, who had ridiculed Hitler so successfully before World War II, Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, also disappeared from the scene. Voskovec reappeared as a film star in the United States, Werich became an enemy of the regime and was persecuted by the communists. Several of my parents' friends who had survived the camps, mostly as members of truncated or newly established second families, began to disappear from Brno, some to resurface weeks or months later, in Israel or in the West, in Canada, the United States, even Australia. I have already mentioned how Uncle Hugo tried to convince my parents that Israel was the only country in which he (and we) could feel safe and finally free from persecution. We were not ready. By the time we changed our minds, it was too late for my parents.

Within our nuclear family, the changes took effect immediately. Once more, my father was taken away from home by two plain clothes secret policemen, 'for questioning'. He was released some three days later, and fired from his position at Placeks'. Their department store, as well as everything else they owned was quickly 'nationalized', i.e. stolen by the state and, like all privately owned property throughout the country, allowed to deteriorate and disintegrate, mostly through neglect disorganization and absence of expert leadership. This applied

to factories, industry, agriculture, all aspects of life. For the duration of the communist regime, Miki was labeled as a lackey of imperialist capitalist aggressors and as such, he was precluded from applying for or being offered a position of responsibility. After a period of time, he continued to work as an accountant, always under the 'supervision' of an untrained, better paid member of the communist party. He became known as a conscientious, competent and honest accountant and although he never received much compensation, his humility and gentle nature probably enabled him to accept and become resigned to his fate. He never complained and, when after retirement, he was recalled again and again, to help to balance multiple chaotic budgets around the country, he did so calmly and with equanimity.

With surprising swiftness the party leaders organized so called 'action committees' which consisted of three or four loyal, reliable comrades, all with a working class background and ancestry. They operated not only in every area of the country's public and private life, including industry, agriculture, academia, art, services, but also in every street of every borough of every town and village. Their function was to investigate the background, the reliability and value to the working class of every citizen in the work force, to remove or demote individuals with imperialist aggressive capitalist tendencies and to replace them with loyal, reliable comrades who had and desired absolutely no contact with the West, and who were able to demonstrate their lasting allegiance to the party, to the working class, to the Soviet Union and Comrade Stalin. Furthermore, it was not just the rapidity with which these committees appeared everywhere that was so amazing, but the numbers of individuals identified, who had what corresponded to the party's definition of the appropriate credentials to become their members. Many

of them were quite illiterate, many were eager to settle personal feuds and vendettas with former bosses, some who had had been caretakers or janitors of factories or large apartment blocks fitted the job description perfectly, a minority were true idealists who believed that social equality and justice could only come from a socialist political system. The latter group however, were mostly intellectuals and had to be watched carefully. Few of them survived as action committee members for longer than a month or two. Many of the committees operated publicly, in other words, individuals were ordered to appear before them at certain times. Others operated independently. This of course was more time efficient and later became the preferred method of operation. They discussed individuals in their absence, without their knowledge and only informed them of the result of the investigation, for example of a demotion or loss of employment, after the fact. There was no recourse; appeals may have existed, but decisions were never reversed.

It is not the purpose of this personal memoir to provide an analysis or even a detailed description of the political and socio - economic disaster that defined forty years of dictatorial anarchy in what was initially called the Czechoslovak People's Democratic Republic, later the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic , abbreviated to CSSR (as in USSR). What follows this brief introduction, is roughly a chronological account of some anecdotes and events which were characteristic of the times and touched our personal lives or memories. Nationalization and collectivization, the latter mainly in the agricultural sector, continued rapidly and relentlessly, until within a relatively short time, no one was allowed to own any private property, nor were they permitted to employ persons for purposes of business or personal gain. This, in general, resulted in lack of

competition, lack of incentive for the individual, lack of initiative, interest in production or productivity and, most importantly, lack of individual responsibility. Collective responsibility was the prevailing motto and it, together with the socialist philosophy claiming rewards for everyone 'according to their merit' and later, once communism is attained, 'according to their needs', succeeded in destroying any semblance of social or economic order in the country. People who, in the past, had owned property, whether real estate, factories, land or businesses, were by definition capitalists or kulaks, (the latter were former owners of large farms and agricultural firms). Both designations, capitalist and kulak, were synonymous with enemy of the state, undesirable, bourgeois element of society and / or. collaborator with western imperialist aggressors.

Thus the network of ubiquitous action committees succeeded in liquidating many undesirable individuals, most of whom were former leaders in their fields or had leadership potential. Many intellectuals, outspoken writers, journalists who did not leave the country in time, were arrested, as were former factory or other wealthy property owners, liberal politicians, others. There were loyal, reliable party informers everywhere, always eager to help and report on undesirable activities, suspicious conversations etc. It was rumored that during the darkest political period, one out of every five citizens was an informer. I have already mentioned Dr. Krejčí from my high school days who was one of the first to disappear, no one knew where, and Dr. Schroller, our headmaster who was demoted, fired, his school liquidated into oblivion.

On March 23rd 1948, my second cousin, Milena, was born, the first child of Kurt Mandl, my mother's cousin and childhood playmate, and his wife Ilse, who by

then had completed medical school and become a psychiatrist. Our families had remained close, I enjoyed Kurt and Ilse's company and even gave them English lessons at their request. They were model students and our lessons invariably ended with discussions about culture, current affairs and music. Ilse was an exceptionally beautiful woman, Kurt was tall and handsome. They appeared to be the ideal couple with an ideal relationship. In addition, they both had a good, empathetic understanding of my adolescent problems and thoughts. It was natural that we, my parents and I, were involved with preparations for the birth of their baby and spent many exciting moments washing and ironing baby clothes, my mother created and equipped the first crib and bought the first teddy bear. Five days after the birth of Milena, who incidentally was named for Kafka's Milena (Jesenska), mother and baby were due to come home to their apartment. The moment I saw my mother's face as I arrived home from school that day, I knew something was wrong. "Is the baby sick?" I asked. My mother shook her head and handed me a letter from the newly appointed professor of political science at my school, informing my parents that as of April 1st 1948, I was to be expelled from school without the option of applying to any other high school in Brno. I was an undesirable element, I had an unfavorable influence on my classmates and upon the sons and daughters of our hard working people who were striving for socialism. Had it not been so frightening, the letter would have been hilariously funny. I had no idea what had provoked it. My father was already on his way home from work, my mother had called Kurt, informing him that she absolutely could not reach the hospital in time to pick up Ilse and the baby, there was an urgent family crisis. I waited at home for some five hours before my parents returned and explained my crime. I had apparently expressed an opinion in class, about the Marshall Plan for economic help to post war European

countries. Czechoslovakia was initially included among the countries to receive economic aid, as designated by the Marshall Plan, a move that would have greatly benefited the economy and helped in the country's recovery. After the communist putsch, the Plan was considered a superfluous intrusion of the capitalist world upon the communist block, which was allegedly self-sufficient, needed no help and would receive every support from the Soviet Union. So Czechoslovakia rejected the Plan some two days before the deadline. This had been discussed and announced in class and, accustomed to voicing my opinion from my British school experience, I had criticized Czechoslovakia's position, saying that I was convinced that it would have benefited us not only to participate but also that it would have enhanced our relations with the west, which had recently deteriorated quite considerably.

My parents had been asked to participate in an emergency conference about my behavior, with the political science professor presiding. Fortunately, all this occurred early after the take-over and his influence did not extend to the staff of the whole school. The Headmaster, as well as my English teacher, Czech and History teachers all asked for a deferral of the decision and proposed a second chance, on condition that I refrained from poisoning my classmates' minds with similarly subversive opinions for the remainder of my high school career. My parents promised on my behalf and the decision was withdrawn. I was allowed to continue to attend school. Soon after, Marxism - Leninism became a compulsory subject at school, and the grade achieved in it, disproportionately influenced everyone's final grade point average. My father became an enormous help to me, as, with a twinkle in his eye, he explained political science and Marxism Leninism each week before class, using the correct meaningless

phrases and appropriately desirable language. I passed and was therefore allowed to graduate from high school. As a result of all this, Baby Milena and her mother came home from the hospital a day later than originally planned !

I graduated from high school in 1950 and by then, my parents had succeeded in convincing me that a practical, internationally acceptable and recognizable profession would indeed be a sensible choice. I had been home for four years and the Holocaust experience had become part of my life and my thoughts. I agreed that I wanted to work in a field that would help others and be applicable under all circumstances. No one felt secure under the communists, and one never knew what might happen from one day to the next. I decided to apply to medical school, which in Europe at that time, lasted six years, but started immediately after high school. In other words, there was no undergraduate degree, no other preparation. The first two years were basic science years and included biology, physics, many chemistry courses, as well as anatomy for four semesters, histology and embryology. Admission to medical school had always consisted of the appropriate grade point average and recommendations, an entrance exam and a personal interview. The communists added political reliability and a reliable working class background. I had neither of the latter two requirements. Some weeks after I had sent in my application, the janitor of our apartment block rang our fifth floor apartment door bell. She told us that two party members and two members of the communist youth organization had visited her and inquired about our family's relationship to the working class. She informed them that we all worked hard, I helped my mother with the cleaning and she (the janitor) had seen me beating carpets in the yard and cleaning windows several times a year. We were humble, polite people and she thought I would

make a good doctor. Thus did I receive the best recommendation, from the best informed member of the working class and, to everyone's surprise, I received an invitation to the entrance exam and interview. Our future professor of anatomy and histology was the chair at my interview, but he was accompanied by a reliable party member and a worker from one of the Brno factories. As I walked in, the party member asked, without introduction, how I had had the audacity to apply to medical school when I had spent seven years in a hostile western capitalist country, had had to relearn my own language and could not possibly have developed a positive attitude toward our working people, neither in the factories nor on the land. How could I, a member of the bourgeois class, expect the working people to support me for six years while they toiled in the mines and in the steelworks. Although taken aback, I responded that the decision to send me to England was my parents' only way to save my life, there were no other choices available to them at the time. Meanwhile, the professor, a distinguished scientist, an anti-communist, was becoming impatient. (He was later also fired from the university, persecuted and never allowed to work in science again). At the time of our interviews he probably still commanded some respect, because he cleared his throat and said that although my war experience had been an interesting one, he did not think it had any relevance to the subject in hand and could I please be so kind as to discuss the gross anatomy of the brain? The factory member of my committee maintained a respectful silence and asked me no questions. I was admitted into the class of 1956.

Toward the end of that calendar year, an indescribably shameful episode occurred which still makes me shudder whenever I think about it. It was just before Christmas in my first year of medical school, perhaps in the middle of

December 1950. A large demonstration took place on Liberty Square in Brno, called The Red Army Square under the communists. Workers and employees were requesting a 'thirteenth' paycheck, similar to that in neighboring Austria, where apparently everyone was entitled to as many as fourteen paychecks, one per month plus one at the time of the annual vacation and a fourteenth for Christmas or at the end of each calendar year. The Brno factory workers were asking for one extra salary per year. This turned out to be the last truly spontaneous demonstration for the duration of the communist regime. The multiple subsequent ones, at least two to three per year with the Mayday Parade as the paradigm, were all command performances, during which everyone's presence, enthusiasm and active participation were carefully observed, documented and held in favor or against them, depending on the individual informant in question.

On the day of the demonstration, the square was crowded, with tens of thousands of workers carrying Czech flags and banners, demanding more pay. It was difficult to get through to the side streets and, on my way home that day, I happened to avoid the square. The next morning, a meeting was called of our whole first year class, there were some 350 of us, and we assembled in one of the large lecture amphitheatres of the medical school. The meeting was moderated by three upper classmen, all well known and deemed by the underground grapevine to be dangerous party members; one of them had repeated both the first and second years of medical school, because he continued to fail his exams. All three were reliable members of the working class. They informed us that three of our classmates had been seen as they participated in the reactionary, antigovernment, anti Soviet Union demonstration

on Red Square yesterday. These three 'elements' did not deserve to sit and study in medical school, while the factory and agricultural workers labored to provide them with food, books and warm housing. They, three members of the great communist party and of the great communist youth movement moved, on behalf of all of us, that these three traitors, enemies of the state, collaborators of the imperialist agents among us, be expelled irrevocably from medical school, without the option of ever reapplying to this or any other university within the country. The motion was on the table and we were to vote on it, there and then, by acclamation. Initially we refused. By acclamation we requested time to reconsider for at least one day. We had to reassemble next day, but not until most (all?) of us had been approached individually, by several additional trusted comrades and threatened with similar repercussions if we either did not show up or did not vote in favor of the motion. With tears in our eyes, I am ashamed to admit that we voted; by acclamation we ruined the lives of three promising young men. They disappeared and no one ever heard from or about them again. I am even more ashamed to write that although I did not raise my hand, my action helped no one. It was no act of bravery to keep my hands by my sides when my some 340 classmates did my dirty work for me. To this day I wonder what I should have done. Had I openly refused, I would have harmed myself only and I would not have helped my three colleagues. But is that not exactly the philosophy that we criticized so desperately under the Nazis ?

Life went on of course, and as the party functionaries took over more and more luxurious villas, enjoyed more glamorous vacations, drove bigger cars and drank more vodka, the average person's day became grayer, consumer goods became scarcer. The salaries of intellectuals were in negative proportion to those of

manual laborers. “ I’m a miner, who is more?” became the motto. The ever present feeling of uneasiness and fear suddenly culminated in 1952, with reports of arrests of several high ranking party members, with the chairman of the party himself, Rudolf Slánský, at their head. The media (perhaps one should say ‘medium’, since there was a single official view, one idea, one direction and one goal) listed a total of fourteen individuals who, after weeks of torture, threats to their families, forced ingestion of mind altering drugs and starvation, confessed to having been secret agents of western imperialist aggressors, the CIA and other reactionary elements. All fourteen were completely broken when they went to trial, the biggest ‘show’ trial since the Nazis. It was broadcast on the radio, reported in the newspapers all over the Russian satellite countries. Sons and daughters of the accused men denounced them publicly, some at the trial, others in open letters to the newspapers, requesting the ‘highest penalties’ for their traitor fathers. Eleven of the fourteen were hanged, three were sentenced to life imprisonment. All fourteen were Jews, several had suffered under the Nazis; all had initially sincerely believed in communist ideology and set out to build an ideal society with socialist principles and philosophies. In addition to Slansky, whose former name was Stein ??(check!) they included Rudolf (?) Margolius, Frejka etc. etc.

The prominent individuals who were the subjects of the show trials, were not the only ones to be arrested. Hundreds of ‘undesirable elements, enemies of the people’, disappeared, some never to be heard from again; others returned after years of imprisonment, many in the uranium mines of northern Bohemia, only to die of cancer a few years later. I have mentioned my high school classmates, two of whom died after release from prison; their cause of death is not known to

me. Many individuals and families continued to attempt to emigrate unofficially during that time. Some succeeded, others were caught at the border. The whole country was completely surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards in watch towers. Travel outside its borders did not exist and was forbidden. Any individual who officially traveled to the west, and there were none among our acquaintances, was considered suspect by the average person in the street, they were either secret informers of the communists or secret agents with 'connections' among the party leadership. They were not to be trusted. Initially, it was not even possible for us to travel to Poland, East Germany, other satellite countries, and certainly not to the Soviet Union. This was something that was difficult for friends in the west to believe, when, many years later, after we emigrated, we attempted to describe the situation of complete isolation. They assumed, erroneously, that the Soviet Block was one big uniform group of countries. This was not the case. It was not until perhaps the late fifties or early sixties, that the average person, but still mostly comrades, were allowed to vacation in Bulgaria, less frequently Romania, often as a reward for outstanding achievements in industry. Many of these trips were organized by the union and awarded to individual 'outstanding' workers. They did not apply to spouses, nor could spouses participate. As a result, many couples were forced to spend vacations apart from each other and their families. It seems, at least to my knowledge, that no one ever questioned this. Several years later, the situation changed and spouses were able to accompany the 'awardees'. No one in our own family, probably because we were not members of the working class, nor did we have the right connections, was ever fortunate enough to obtain one of these recreation vouchers, as they were called, from the Revolutionary Unionist Movement (R.U.M.) or R.O.H. in Czech.

As the economy continued to deteriorate and fewer consumer goods were available, a new phenomenon was invented that illustrated the ludicrously cruel harassment of the population. Many of the now empty department store windows were suddenly filled with pathetic appearing household goods such as a stack of perhaps six sheets, six comforter covers, a few pillow cases, two or three bolts of material (for sewing) a carpet or two and perhaps a tea or dinner service or both. A label would be prominently displayed amid the sad little collection, announcing in large print that these items had been confiscated from 'capitalist enemies of the state' who had been 'hoarding' them in their houses or apartments. The items in the window usually represented the contents of a single household which had been officially and legally looted by comrades loyal to the working people, the owners either arrested or designated as undesirable bourgeois reactionaries. The displays changed periodically always attracting small groups of appropriately shocked passers by, who commented on the decadence of these capitalists who had obviously been stealing and accumulating these goods at the expense of the working people. No one knew which of the bystanders were secret provocateurs and which of them were sincere in their indignation. Baťa's former shoe store with its large glass windows was conveniently situated in the middle of town for this purpose. We lived near and whenever I walked past, I would shudder and think of yet another poor family whose life had been destroyed once more in the middle of the night, this time not by the Nazis, but by those who called themselves Communists, representatives of the people. Several of them were clandestine former Nazi collaborators who remembered well the methods of their instructors.

My old friend Jiří whose mother saw no future for him in Czechoslovakia had attempted to escape across the border to Austria in the autumn of 1948. It seemed that he had several strikes against him and the conflicts had become insurmountable. His family had owned property and been capitalists before the war; he was the son of a Jewish father who was out of the picture, having remained abroad, in the west; he had attended German schools for part of the war years, his mother had identified with German culture and he was still prohibited from admission to a Czech school or university. One day, he disappeared without saying good bye or in any way indicating his family's plans for him. I was devastated. I was seventeen and suddenly I realized that I was in love. No one made me feel the way he did when we were together, no one understood me the way he did, there was no one with whom I had so much in common, emotionally, intellectually, philosophically. There was no one whom I longed for and missed as intensively.

He reappeared before Christmas 1948. He had been caught, arrested at the border and somehow, in a way that is still incomprehensible to me, his family managed to attain his release. I never learnt the details and he begged me not to mention the subject. We were both ecstatic and, during that most wonderful winter and spring of my life, we were together as much and whenever possible. Late in the summer of 1949, he disappeared again, suddenly, without warning, this time forever. He resurfaced for a time in Austria and later in Canada. I have never ceased to think about him.

A year later, as I was returning home after a walk with our little dog Petya, I was addressed in the elevator of our building by a young man. He introduced himself as Tibor Lax, from the sixth floor, and asked if by chance I might be free to go for a walk with him that evening or perhaps the next time I took my little dog out again. I responded that that evening, I happened to be giving an English lesson (which I did regularly, in order to make a little pocket money). Some days later, he appeared at our door. I was not home, but my mother described that he had been wearing a dark three piece suit, a white shirt and silk tie, and asked whether she thought I would have time to accept him as one of my English students.

We were married on March 12th 1951, in a civil ceremony at the Brno Town Hall. At that time, wedding ceremonies were considered a throwback to the capitalist bourgeois era, and were therefore as drab, unfestive and unceremonious as possible. They were conducted at half hour intervals, by some authorized official, who recited his lines mechanically without ever raising his eyes from the paper in front of him, in a somewhat large room at the town hall. There was no music, no white dresses, bridesmaids, nothing. I expressed regret at the anticipated shabbiness of the proceedings and once, during a conversation, my mother asked me what music I would have chosen, had I had the option. I said, among other things that I had played Schubert's Impromptu in A flat for Tibor and he liked it and asked for it each time we were near a piano. We also liked Sarasate's Gipsy melodies which were closer to Tibor's background than mine, but I knew that my father loved them too. I thought no more about music for my wedding, since I knew it was impossible. As the doors opened to the room where the ceremony was to take place, I gripped my father's arm and stopped. I was

met by the strains of Schubert's Impromptu in A flat. There, to the right of the double doors was a little harmonium, played by a friend of mine from the Academy of Music. Once more, my enterprising mother had achieved the impossible. Against the rules and protestations of officialdom, I assume that she had bribed the right individuals, arranged for the harmonium to be brought in and contacted the artist. To everyone's amazement, the harmonium was not removed from that room for many years, so thanks to my mother, the weddings of many future couples in Brno were made at least a little more festive by the addition of music. The addition of a church wedding to the civil one was officially permitted several years later, but frowned upon even then.

There was a great deal I did not know about Tibor when I married him. I was still thinking and dreaming about Jiří, but I realized that Tibor was a decent, honest human being who loved me very much. He was completely alone in the world, working at the Veterinary School in Brno, some three years post graduation. He had been an excellent, straight 'A' student who had completed five and a half years of study in three, while working, prior to its nationalization, on his parents' farm in eastern Slovakia for six months of each of those three years. In other words he was driven. He was exceptionally competent at his work, and was already rising in the academic ranks at the Veterinary School. I clearly remember the moment I decided to accept his proposal of marriage. He had been called out of town unexpectedly, to a sick cow. (The school had its own farm and the faculty and students provided all the veterinary care there. It was part of the training.) I accompanied him that evening and as I watched his large hands, first gently, tenderly, yet firmly and efficiently examining the cow, then placing a huge rubber hose down its throat, quickly, painlessly and effectively, to the

immense and dramatic relief of the cow's symptoms, I somehow decided that here was someone who, with little nonsense, would always be able to cope and take care of a family and whose values and priorities were similar to my own.

I also knew that he had survived the Holocaust, while his parents and grandparents had not. He was an only child, but he told us that at his Bar Mitzvah in 1935, there had been one hundred and twenty relatives present. His father had been one of eight siblings, seven brothers and one sister. One of the brothers, the oldest, had emigrated to the United States in the 1920's, one other survived the camps. In addition, two or three cousins had survived, one in Israel, one in Hungary. Roughly then, of 120 individuals, some four or five were alive after the war, including my husband. What I did not know and nor did he, was the extent and the depth of the impact that Tibor's almost sole survival within his family, would have upon the rest of our future lives and those of our children.

Tibor was born in 1922 in a little village in eastern Slovakia, called Širkovce. His father, Menyhert in Hungarian or Melichar in Slovakian, was an expert cattle breeder who won many first prizes at fairs for his stud bulls. His mother, Anna, nee Weisz, had been educated by nuns in a Catholic school. She spoke German and French, as well as Hungarian and Slovakian. They lived in a two story house, one of two or three, on the main street of the village; a few houses down was the home of Tibor's maternal grandparents. They owned a store, which was also licensed to sell alcoholic beverages, and lived above it. Tibor rarely talked about his early childhood, he couldn't without breaking down and crying bitterly. But even that did not occur until later in our marriage. I know he had a tricycle

and prided himself on being able to take out the screw in its mid section and ride down the hill on the seat and two rear wheels. He recalled being in trouble with his father, when he once suggested that one of his girl cousins try the same trick. He unscrewed the tricycle for her and she ended up with stitches in her knee. He might have been four at the time. He definitely was four, when he was first sent (or taken) to Cheder, that is Hebrew school for small boys in the neighboring , somewhat larger village, called Jesenské , some five kilometers distant. Thus, like other little boys in his family, he could read Hebrew before he could read or write Hungarian or Slovakian. I think he attended primary school near home, but at the age of ten he became a boarder with a Jewish family in the nearest district town, called Rimavská Sobota, where there was a good eight year Hungarian high school. He shared a room with other boys his age, ate and lived with the family and traveled home on weekends for holidays and vacations. He loved life on the farm, he worked with his father in the fields and traveled with him on his trips to buy and sell cattle. So Tibor's interest in animals and all things agricultural stemmed from his early childhood. He described it as happy, peaceful, oriented toward family rituals, customs and get togethers. He did not mention whether or not it was hard for him to live away from home at such an early age, but it seems he took it in stride, since other boys in the family, as well as friends, had similar experiences. The family synagogue was in Jesenske, i.e. a five kilometer walk away. Memories of those walks, as he accompanied his father to and from synagogue, remained among the most painful, for the rest of Tibor's life.

The only real sadness he encountered in those early years was the loss of his grandfather Weisz, who apparently went for a walk one day, caught a cold and

died, within days, of pneumonia. The post - Holocaust Tibor whom I married, was different from the one described to me, in answer to my questions, by the few surviving friends who had known him previously. He was apparently happy, friendly, liked to sing, dance and enjoy himself. The part of him that did not seem to have changed significantly was that they all remembered him as a serious and dedicated student and a devoted son.

In 1940, when Tibor was eighteen and graduating from high school, Slovakia was, as mentioned previously, a Nazi friendly country, with Hungarian fascists in power. Lives of Jews were restricted, they were discriminated against and persecuted, no longer allowed to own property or businesses, but in comparison with events in Bohemia and Moravia, and elsewhere in Europe, their lives were initially somewhat less hard. At least they were surviving and I assume that it was less difficult to find food in the country than in the cities and towns. Some years previously, the Lax family had taken in a young woman from the village who had been rejected by her own parents because she had become pregnant and was unmarried. Her name was Maria and she and her little daughter who was born at the Lax house, became members of the family. Because she was a Christian, Tibor's parents eventually deeded the house and the farm to Maria, in the hope that that would prevent its complete take - over by strangers and that it might provide them with some protection from eviction or transportation to the east.

Tibor graduated from high school (in Hungarian) and initially worked with his father, on the farm and in the cattle business which was quickly taken over by Hungarian bosses. He helped his parents in whatever way he could and, during

the second year of the war, he left for Budapest, where he worked in factories and at any jobs that were available to young Jewish men. It was easier to be inconspicuous in the big city and he was still able to come home quite frequently, contribute money and provide support. Toward the end of 1943 and throughout 1944, Hitler turned his attention toward the Slovakian and Hungarian Jews respectively. Tibor, with several peers were sent to forced labor camps, run initially by the Hungarians, military representatives of the fascist Nyilasi government, later by the Nazis themselves. From mid 1944, he was no longer able to return home. There were several camps, most were on Hungarian territory. In the fall of that year he found himself in Hajdu Bessermeney where military aircraft were stored and repaired (check spelling). It was an important target for frequent intensive bombing raids by the Allies, sometimes several times per day. The Jewish boys in these military camps were generally treated as slaves. Many were shot or otherwise killed, some died of starvation. One of the most important military camp 'rules' was, that Jews were not allowed to use the shelters during air raids. Tibor, with two friends, began to discuss and secretly prepare for escape. Somehow, they procured false military identity cards and a hospital pass for one of them with the appropriate stamp of the camp commandant. The other two had orders to accompany him to the nearest hospital. The plan was simple and it was neither very imaginative, nor was it a particularly reliable method of escape, but it was all that was available. Furthermore, each small step in the process of preparation was fraught with danger, risk of discovery and death. Their last preparatory act was to rip off the yellow stars from their outer clothing. One afternoon, during the noise, confusion and chaos of a particularly severe air attack, they managed to escape unnoticed from the camp. They ran through the woods as quickly as possible, and, as it

grew dark, they walked along the road. Suddenly they found themselves within the blinding glare of car headlights. Not wishing to arouse suspicion by attempting to flee, they stopped and waited. Four Gestapo officers stepped out of the car, revolvers poised. The three fugitives were convinced they were lost. As the officers barked at them to produce their papers, one of them explained that they were under orders to go to the nearest hospital. Their papers were examined, returned to them, and they were told to move on. Tibor could never understand how they escaped, why the Germans believed them, perhaps their excuse was so transparently simple that it did not occur to the Nazis that it was false.

They walked through the nights and slept through the day. As winter approached, they realized they could not continue to walk and run indefinitely. They found themselves not far from Sirkovce, Tibor's village, where he knew the area well. By then snow had fallen and the weather was cruel. They decided to dig in for the winter and since they were not far from familiar farms and homesteads, Tibor thought they could stay alive by stealing an occasional chicken, digging in the frozen ground for remnants of corn, carrots, potatoes etc. There was plenty of wood around and with it, they lined an underground igloo, built from snow and ice. I know few details unfortunately, but that is how they managed to spend the severe part of winter 1944 to 1945, until the liberation by the Red Army, early in 1945. Many years later, when our children and I wanted to go camping in the summer, Tibor almost always refused. He had had enough camping, he said, to last a lifetime.

They took turns sleeping and guarding their hiding place. One morning, as it was Tibor's turn to be on guard, he could not find the friend whom he was to relieve. As he searched the surrounding woods, he found him, hanging from a tree.

On another occasion, as the front approached, Tibor and his remaining friend found the dead German soldier in a ditch whose coat they appropriated. They took turns wearing it and I have mentioned previously that it was that coat that resulted in the capture by the Soviets of Pali (Paul) Tibor's friend, and almost in his deportation to Siberia.

By then Širkovce and the surrounding areas had been liberated and Tibor ventured home. He found Maria and her daughter. Maria had been present as Tibor's parents, Anna and Melichar Lax, and his grandmother Bertha Weisz, had boarded the cattle wagons with other Jews from the surrounding area, for 'relocation in the east'. No one, apart from one uncle, his father's brother Ignatz, had returned. One of the paternal cousins who had survived was also named Tibor; they called him Tibi and he was some two years younger than my Tibor. He had been the son of David Lax (one of the seven brothers). Many years later, he was able to describe to Tibor (my husband) how his own father David and Tibor's father Melichar, had died of typhus on the way to Auschwitz. He Tibi, son of David, had buried them side by side somewhere outside Auschwitz. They died in February 1945. Anna and Bertha (her mother) had survived the trip to Auschwitz and, upon arrival, they had both followed the direction of Mengele's thumb which pointed straight to the gas chambers. After the war, Tibi married Rachel, also an Auschwitz survivor, who came from the same area. Together they emigrated to Israel and, via Australia, they finally settled in Canada where

they raised their family. They still live there, surrounded by their children, grandchildren and some remaining relatives. For us, they were and are, the only representatives of the large, extended Lax family with whom we were able to establish ongoing contact.

I obtained the following information from Maria's daughter, the child who had been born and raised in the Sirkovce home of the Lax family. At age fifteen or sixteen, she spent a month with us in Brno, during the summer vacation of 1952 or '53. It was Tibor's way of expressing gratitude to her mother who had single handedly attempted to maintain his parents' farm, the house, and had prepared for their home coming which never occurred.

After liberation by the Soviets, Tibor had returned to the village and waited for his parents, as he tried to restore some order to the chaos that followed the front which had passed through. I do not know when or how he finally learned that his parents and grandparents had perished. The young girl described how, between his daily chores, he ran back and forth to the Red Cross center where lists and the whereabouts of survivors and those seeking family members were periodically published and updated. One day, he did not return. Maria and her daughter waited for three days and nights (the daughter must have been about eight years old at the time) . On the third day, they found Tibor, lying unconscious at the bottom of a field, which adjoined his parents' property. They brought him home and nursed him back to health, but as far as she knew, he was not injured or physically sick. After he recovered, a completely different Tibor from the one they had known (the girl's words) threw himself into work on the farm, traveled to Brno, enrolled at the Veterinary School and began the six

monthly cycle of intense study, alternating with work on the farm, until its confiscation by the Communists in 1949.

She could provide no more details, nor did I ever find the courage to admit to Tibor that I knew about that episode. From that time on however, early in 1945, he joined the Communist party, maintaining, like so many young intellectuals of his generation, firstly, that racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economic equality was the only solution and antidote to fascism. Secondly, it was his unwavering opinion at the time, that, had the Jewish and other persecuted populations been organized under united and capable leadership, it would not have been possible for the Nazis to systematically destroy over six million innocent men, women and children. So, with characteristic energy, conviction and uncompromising drive, Tibor set out to establish a classless, a-religious society, initially among his colleagues and peers, later within his own family. He studied day and night, he labored on the farm, he attended political meetings. He did not grieve for the past (at least overtly), he did not mourn his parents, he did not, could not bring himself to attend a synagogue, nor did he participate in any of the traditional rituals which he had been taught and which had not only formed his childhood, but which, as I found out much later, were an inseparable part of his inner self. All that was too unbearably painful, he talked to no one about the war, about his childhood, he charged ahead. He had to go forward, he said, thinking about the past was destructive and led nowhere. "We have to look ahead", was his motto. "The past is over, the future is everything". He refused to discuss anything remotely related to his experiences, he would not answer questions about his parents' suffering and, in general, he would become angry if anyone mentioned the Holocaust. Furthermore, in the early months of our marriage, he could not tolerate even tongue in cheek criticism of the regime or of the political situation.

In his mind he had selected socialism as his coping mechanism to counteract the overpowering emotions that consumed him. The Soviet system, under Stalin (!!!) he insisted, was the only way in which to prevent the recurrence of another Holocaust.

One of my own lifelong regrets, of which I have never been able to rid myself, is that neither my parents nor I, nor anyone around us knew enough or had enough insight to realize that Tibor was not a fundamentally angry or argumentative individual. We did not understand then what today seems so simple and transparently clear, that his aggression, his inability or unwillingness to communicate about sensitive issues, were based on two all - encompassing emotions. One was guilt, the other was unresolved grief.

Like so many others, he suffered not only from survivor guilt, but later, he also confessed that he could not help believing that he could have saved his parents, if he had been at home at the time of their deportation. He was unable to accept the fact that that option had not been available to him: young Jewish men had had to report for forced labor many months before transports to the east began in Slovakia. There was no contact between him and his parents for at least a year before they disappeared. All this resulted in an incredibly complicated and tangled relationship between Tibor and my own parents and much anguish and unhappiness for me, who found myself in the middle of their conflicts. My parents took Tibor at face value. He was decent, hard working, he would take good care of me, and, sadly, he was completely alone in the world. My mother longed to embrace the son she had never had. She was proud of him, wanted to introduce him to her friends and both she and my father, although Miki was less

demonstrative, welcomed him as a member of our family. Neither they nor I saw any reason for potential discord. I was nineteen years old when we were married and even somewhat relieved that, because of the housing shortage under communism, we had no alternative but to remain in our parents' apartment. Everything would go on as before. There would be four of us instead of three for meals, holidays, birthdays, all of which would be celebrated as always. When my parents had bridge parties, both Tibor and I would dutifully shake hands and serve tea, make a little small talk, then leave. Occasionally, we would accompany my parents to visit friends. My father would have someone with whom to go to synagogue and discuss synagogue or community politics. I suppose that, however subconsciously, that is how my parents and I envisioned my married life.

For Tibor, it was all much too much, much too soon. The tension started almost immediately. Perhaps a week after we returned from our two day honeymoon in Prague, we came home one evening, Tibor from work, I from school, as my parents were hosts to a two table bridge party. I entered the room to say 'hello' and our visitors were good naturedly and naturally interested in meeting my new husband. I have mentioned previously and should reiterate here, that, among my parents' friends, I was one of only a few survivors within my own generation, our numbers perhaps in the single digits. Furthermore, at the time, I was the only one who had done something as normal as being married and, thirdly, ours was the only intact nuclear family unit. Thus some of my parents' bridge partners were vicariously and generously participating in my parents' joy, perhaps reliving or imagining moments that they themselves would never experience. Tibor refused to enter the room. He was not interested in 'cards' he said, he had better

and many more important things to do and he certainly did not intend to be 'exhibited' to a bunch of people who were curious about him. Nothing I or later my mother could say or do, would convince him to agree to be introduced to the visitors. My mother was embarrassed and upon reentering the room, she made lame excuses about a 'headache' or something . Eventually my parents' friends stopped asking about the son-in-law and among themselves labeled him as a 'somewhat unusual recluse'. On the rare occasions when he ran into someone in the hallway or kitchen, Tibor would mostly be monosyllabically polite and would refuse to be drawn into a conversation. Tension prevailed even when there were no guests and only the four of us were at home together. He complained to me , and retrospectively I recognize that he had a point, that we had no married life. I was not a wife, he said, I continued to be my parents' teen aged daughter. This was true. First I was only nineteen. Second, I had hardly had a chance to be a daughter and third, we were forced to live together in a single apartment. It may have been the latter, that contributed most significantly to the general discord and misunderstandings. Perhaps things would have been different if I had been more mature and if my parents had accepted our separation from them, for hours on end in the evenings or on weekends. But they expected us to be together, at meals, after meals, at least for a period of time, in the same way that the three of us had shared our lives for four short years together. Tibor understandably wanted me for himself when he was home, he would have liked our meals to be separate, at least some of the time, while my mother usually cooked for all of us, and called us to have dinner together, whenever we were at home. It all seems so trivial now, fifty years later. But it was not a happy time, and when Tibor and I were alone, on walks, outings, in the mountains, I wished fervently that we had an independent little space of our own, however small, to

which we could return, so that we would not have to face the tension of all the expectations associated with living together at home. I begged him, repeatedly, to rise above what I saw as the trivialities of some of my mother's expectations, but he either would not or perhaps could not adjust to a life that he saw as partially different but in many ways reminiscent of that which he was so desperately and unsuccessfully trying to forget.

Our first Yom Kippur together occurred in the fall of 1951. My father assumed that Tibor would go to synagogue with him. Tibor refused, and much to the dismay and astonishment of both my parents, he announced that he would not be home for the festive dinner preceding the fast, nor did he intend to fast. When questioned as to his reasons for this astounding decision, he refused to respond. My father sighed, sadly shook his head and in his characteristically gentle way, abandoned the subject. My mother on the other hand, commented that she thought Tibor's parents deserved to be honored by his attendance in synagogue on the most important day of the Jewish calendar year, even if he had decided not to observe any of the other customs or traditions. Tibor exploded. She had no right even to mention his parents, he screamed, she had no idea what family life was, what it meant to observe traditions and customs, nor what it meant to prepare a daughter for marriage. Her only interest, he said, was socializing and playing cards. Furthermore, this was a different time and the old life was gone - forever - this was communism, the only solution to the world's problems. Traditions were no longer needed, nor were they important, one had to work, work, work, so that there was something tangible to show for one's life, one had to face only forward, toward progress. That interchange ended communication between Tibor and my parents for several months. My mother insisted that he

apologize, he was unrelenting and unrepentant. My father was deeply unhappy and tried, unsuccessfully, to approach Tibor. I was devastated and severely frustrated by my husband's stubborn insistence that this was between him and my parents and did not involve me (!)

The general social situation of the time was of course favorable for a complete separation and rejection of previous customs and traditions. Religion, according to communist doctrine, was the poisonous opium of nations. Regular Sunday or holiday church services no longer existed; where they did, they were attended by a mere handful of elderly people, mostly women who would creep along, bent with arthritis, their faces hidden by large scarves. They were conducted only by officially approved clergy, known to be loyal to the party ideology. One of my classmates and friends in medical school came from a deeply religious Catholic family. She had been raised in the mountains, in northern Moravia, near the Polish border and was one of the best students in the class, extremely bright and conscientious. During our first year, she attended church services regularly and insisted on continuing to do so, in spite of several summons before the class party committee. It was not until she was threatened with expulsion from school that, with tears in her eyes, she told me that she had decided to give in, rather than sacrifice the opportunity to become a physician and help the impoverished mountain people around her home town. When I visited her several years after graduation, that was indeed what she was doing. Many of her patients were miners from the coal mines in the area. She herself died quite young of lung cancer (never having smoked in her life). It is interesting to note, that the few brave individuals who persevered in religious customs and church attendance, my friend included, all reported that they had never observed a familiar face

outside or inside the church or meeting house that they attended. The political spies were either informing on the basis of hearsay or watching, unseen from nearby buildings, taking notes as to who was entering which church. There is no doubt that religious observance was a serious crime and many individuals were arrested purely for that and no other, even fictitious, reason. The clergy suffered too of course. Those who were allowed to remain in their function and there were few, had to incorporate political philosophy and ideology into their sermons. Most elected to seek other lives; many members of religious orders, nuns as well as monks disappeared to institutions for the mentally and physically handicapped, or nursing homes, where they cared expertly and devotedly for the sick and frail under the most appallingly spartan conditions.

Within that context, I am reminded of an episode from my professional life. It occurred in the early sixties. I was working in Brno in a pediatric research center within the grounds of the University Children's Hospital . The center had been recently established and those of us who were present at its beginnings, decided that it would be devoted to medical genetics, a subject that had been forbidden and therefore neglected for so long, that we were behind the rest of the civilized world. Although the political and ideological climate had not improved, it appeared to us, that the time was ripe to introduce genetics, at least into the science of medicine, if not agriculture. In spite of the gap between the west and ourselves, we were aware that even in the west, the practice of medical and clinical genetics was young, so that if we studied and learned intensively, we could perhaps avoid some of the mistakes and labor pains that occur inevitably in any new field. Prior to 1968, we succeeded in catching up rather quickly. We performed twin research on a large scale and obtained much valuable population

genetics information. Among other projects, we had established both the Berry (urine) and Guthrie (blood) tests for phenylketonuria (PKU) in our laboratory but decided that before we offered testing to the newborn population at large, we would perfect methods and logistics by screening the mentally retarded population first. Untreated patients with PKU and other inborn errors of metabolism would most probably be found in institutions for the mentally handicapped.

So my biochemist colleague and friend Anthony (Tonda) and I set out to explain the problem and enlist the help of the directors of the institutions for the mentally handicapped in southern Moravia. Children and adults were mostly housed in lovely, ornate old buildings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, country homes of the former nobility, with few modern adaptations and almost no medical facilities. The residents as well as the buildings were immaculately clean, (no smells anywhere) and where possible, children were taught, stimulated and entertained. The staff were mostly nuns and monks.

Tonda and I had already visited several such institutions and on one of these occasions we had made an appointment and were in the process of explaining to the nun in charge, the Mother Superior, that we were interested in looking for children and adults who had a certain genetic disorder, caused by the absence of a biochemical substance, called an enzyme, which, when absent, resulted in life long mental retardation and developmental delays. Leaving the long name of the disorder 'phenylketonuria', until the end of our discussion, we usually introduced the staff of the institution to our request for permission to screen the urine of the residents, with a detailed explanation of the disorder as well as the test we used to identify it and, above all, of the dietary treatment which, if

initiated at birth, could prevent a child from becoming mentally retarded. On the particular occasion in question however, the Mother Superior interrupted us in mid -stream. "Are you by any chance referring to phenylketonuria?" she asked politely. Tonda's and my mouths dropped open. It turned out that this Mother Superior who had been removed to the backwoods of the country, ignored and persecuted by society and her church, had a Ph.D. in biochemistry. Needless to say, she collaborated enthusiastically and it was she who helped us determine, for the first time, at least in our country, that the proportion of individuals with untreated PKU among the population with developmental delays was consistently about one percent.

Life went on and gradually, the tension, at least within our family began to ease somewhat. It usually resurfaced during political discussions, particularly about the deteriorating economy. Tibor, like every other thinking individual was losing his illusions about the Soviet system. He was confused and horrified by the show trials in 1952, involving Slansky and other loyal well intentioned communists. He saw the chaotic disorganization of agriculture: the collective farm, the 'kolchoz', with politically correct comrades, not farmers, in charge, did not seem to be working, no one was planting or harvesting, because everyone was responsible for everything, yet the five year plan, whether in heavy industry or in agriculture, was always fulfilled on paper at 105%. Cattle and sheep were undernourished, worm infested and sick. The only way to make a living in the country was to 'steal' from the state. Farmers would secretly keep a few hens or a single cow, a pig and an acre or two of land. This was permitted only to those who had fulfilled their obligations to the collective, so many were arrested for subversive activities, hostile to the state. The subject was so painful for Tibor,

that he became even more defensive. I suppose that in his mind, these were the ideals for which he had rejected his old life, sacrificed his parents' traditions, customs and beliefs. Those ideals were now disintegrating, falling apart, and there was nothing left. He confided in no one, not even in me; stubbornly he continued to insist that the system was undergoing labor pains, things would improve; it was the only way to face the future. We all learnt to avoid the subject of politics in Tibor's presence. For the rest of us, as long as we were at least able to continue some semblance of a normal life, and no one was arrested, the whole political, economical and even cultural picture resembled a tragicomical farce. In some families however, tragedy prevailed. The following is a typical example.

My mother had a dear friend, younger than she, who had gone to the same girls' lyceum, several classes below my mother. Marie was an extraordinarily beautiful woman, tall, slender, with brown wavy hair and sparkling light green eyes. She had an enchanting smile that lit up not only her being, but the world around her. Before Hitler, she had married a successful Brno architect and their life had been similar to that of other young couples of their generation, they had friends, attended concerts and the theatre and looked forward to the future. Both Marie and her husband were deported to Terezin and later to Auschwitz. She survived, he did not. In 1945, she was thirty years old and sometime later, she remarried a kind man Ervin, who was 19 years her senior. He, too, had been married before the war and his wife had been murdered.

Ervin's family had owned a soap and detergent factory before the war, which he reclaimed and directed before the communists appropriated it. Together, he and

Marie owned a beautiful white villa on the shores of one of the Brno lakes which became a favorite meeting place for the small remaining group of friends who had survived the Holocaust. My mother reminisced fondly of lovely evenings at the lake, quietly watching the sunset, playing cards, laughing, talking, remembering. In 1947, their first child, George, was born and in 1950, his little sister, Daniela came along, having inherited her mothers looks and, above all her delightful smile. By then Ervin, their father, was fifty four years old. I think that for a few years, he continued to work as an employee in his own factory, later he was forced to work elsewhere, as a laborer. When Daniela was seven years old and George ten and a half, their father was arrested by the communists. He was charged with being a capitalist, a factory owner, an enemy of the state and a traitor. He was also accused of helping other traitors and imperialist aggressors to escape to the west. To my knowledge, there was no trial, no official defense. Some political prisoners were assigned public 'defenders', all of them puppets of the non existent legal system. As far as is known Ervin was not provided even with a nominal defense. He was away from home for some three years and I am uncertain if his family knew where he was or whether there was any communication between them. He returned when Daniela was ten and George thirteen, a completely broken man.

After her husband's arrest, Marie and the two children were left destitute. Initially, as the wife of a traitor and enemy of the state, she was not allowed to seek employment. Furthermore, the system would have frowned upon and punished anyone who may have had the courage to offer work to the wife of an individual who had betrayed the working class. No one knew or cared about how or whether they survived. Eventually, having received permission for piece work at

home, she obtained a knitting machine and produced sweaters for minimal reward. The lovely villa was, of course, confiscated. The children continued to attend grade school, but their mother was fully aware that once the time came for them to seek admission to a good academically oriented high school, that opportunity would be closed. For a period of time, Marie and Ervin's friends rallied loyally around the family. Even that had to be done secretly. Anyone who was seen communicating with capitalist traitors or members of their families, was automatically labeled as an enemy of the state and, together with members of his/her family, risked persecution and arrest also. In fact and in reality, although not directed at an entire segment of the population, the situation was not at all dissimilar to that during the Nazi occupation. Tragically, it was all a simple case of *déjà vu*. My mother would disappear from home, usually late in the evening, after dark and I would hear my father admonishing her to be careful. I do not know the details of the activities that the group of friends organized around Marie and the children; she recalled that, among other things, they had bought her a new washing machine. George and Daniela were invited to spend vacations as well as many evenings with close friends. Above all, it was friendship and unconditional loyalty that provided strength and moral support.

When Ervin finally returned from the prison camps, both he and Marie were assigned as forced 'assistant' laborers to a textile factory. They had to unload huge bales of cloth from trucks, stacking them in what Marie described as pyramids. Each was assigned to a different work group. Marie's consisted of six women who would literally pool their strength by physically leaning on each other. Together, they lifted the heavy bales and hoisted them up an incline where the 'pyramids' were to be stacked. Ervin's work detail was ordered to load and

unload even heavier and bigger bales. Marie is convinced that the strain of the labor, together with the stress of his imprisonment, contributed to Ervin's sudden death, at age 67, of a massive heart attack, on April 12th 1963. It was the day of Marie's 48th birthday.

Some time after Ervin's death, Marie happened to be describing her work situation to her physician; the latter immediately mentioned that she knew of a colleague, the head of the University department of pulmonary diseases, who had recently lost his secretary and administrative assistant. She suggested that Marie contact him. As she arrived for her interview, the professor handed Marie a pencil and asked her to take dictation. The first letter was in Czech, the second in German, the third in English and the fourth in French. Marie was hired on the spot and, despite the salary which 'by law' could not exceed that of an assistant laborer, she enjoyed the work, found it challenging, rewarding and maintained friendly contact with her boss for many years to come.

Years later, Ervin, like many other political and innocently persecuted victims, was officially but posthumously rehabilitated. For Marie, George and Daniela, it was too late. After the invasion of the Warsaw Pact forces that followed the Prague Spring in 1968, they were among the first families to emigrate to the west. This was neither surprising nor was it for Marie a dream fulfilled. Her life, as well as that of her children, continued its roller coaster course, even though her beauty, her charm and intelligence belied her lifelong inner struggle. Like so many families whose fate was similar, they are close, loving and they telephone to one another frequently, unfortunately each from a different country.

The above incident was not isolated. I have already mentioned my professor of anatomy and histology who was fired quite soon after our class entered medical school. In addition, we had a well known professor of biology who was interested in genetics, who disappeared in my second year, namely in 1952. Genetics under the communists was of course a forbidden subject. According to the 'stars' of Soviet science and agriculture, Lysenko and Michurin, heredity was nothing, the environment was everything. What was transmitted from generation to generation, were acquired traits or characteristics. Genes were a bourgeois myth created by the reactionary proponents of 'Mendelism-Morganism'. As a result, instruction of genetics was strictly forbidden. The young scientist who, in the department of Biology attempted to reproduce Mendel's experiments, was also arrested. This was all the more shameful because our medical school was in the city in which Mendel had made his discoveries, just ten minutes walk from the Augustinian monastery where he lived, worked and became abbot. Furthermore, since our university had originally been named for President Masaryk who by the 1950's had become an unmentionable reactionary enemy of the people (all his statues and monuments had been destroyed or hidden by a few courageous patriots, as incidentally had Mendel's) the university bore the name of Jan Evangelista Purkyně, a younger collaborator and admirer of Mendel. It was difficult to understand how the political powers reconciled this seemingly incongruous phenomenon, but who were we to question it? The University of J.E. Purkyně was infinitely preferable to the University of Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin, J.V. Stalin or worse, one of the illustrious leaders, most of them illiterate, who were in power in our own country at the time. In any event, genetics was a subject never to be discussed, nor was the word ever pronounced in other than hateful derogatory terms. A few students in our class were occasionally invited in

the evening, only under cover of darkness, to the home of one of the assistant professors for discussions of human blood types, the Rh factor, the inheritance of cystic fibrosis (called mucoviscidosis in Europe) hemophilia and other forbidden topics. We never mentioned these discussions or our visits in class, not even among ourselves. I cannot say for certain if it was specifically that forbidden fruit that ignited in me a lifelong interest in human genetics, whether it was a subconscious form of rebellion or mere coincidence. It was most probably the last of the three, because this all happened in my first year of medical school. In reality, I probably had no idea of the direction in which my life or my interests would turn.

Marxist-Leninist ideology pervaded every aspect of life. I have mentioned the obligatory classes, requiring huge amounts of reading, little of which made much sense, that disproportionately influenced our grade point average throughout medical school. Sometime in my second year, Soviet 'scientists' Olga Lepeshinskaya and her colleague Oparin received the Stalin prize for the discovery of the origin of life from inert, anorganic materials ! We also had compulsory courses in the Russian language, which, had they been taught by more competent instructors, could have been enjoyable and useful. As it was, the necessary qualifications for a university position in teaching Marxism-Leninism or Russian, were hardly related to expertise. Applicants had to be reliable, loyal, vigilant comrades, whose eyes and ears were constantly directed toward potentially hostile reactionary elements within the student as well as the professorial body of the university. Nevertheless, I am grateful for the six years of Russian instruction I received. After all, it is another rich and beautiful language.

Overt harassment of the students however, was nothing compared to the monthly reports that every professor and lecturer was required to submit to the departmental as well as the university committee of the Communist Party. Each teacher had to provide proof that his / her course, laboratory practicum, demonstrations etc, in other words, every aspect of instruction, was presented in the spirit of marxist- leninist principles.

This was a serious undertaking because there were those in every class of the six years whose presence continuously reminded us of our and our teachers' debt to the working class, without whose good will, toil and suffering, we would not be sitting idle in medical school. I have mentioned that there were some 320 students admitted to my first year. Of these, twenty had been selected, not on the basis of academic skills or record, in fact some (I don't know how many) had not even graduated from high school, but on the basis of their parents' poor working class background and their own political reliability, activities in the communist youth movement, in the initial Action committees, they had been *invited* to enroll in medical school! In fairness to the leadership of the university, I should add that of the original twenty in my class, only two graduated with a medical degree six years later; the remaining eighteen dropped out during the course of mostly the first three, most difficult, theoretical years. A professor who failed one of these students however, risked his future at the university. It would be a member of this group of students 'from the working class' who, in the midst of a difficult lecture on neurophysiology, would raise his hand and ask the comrade professor, how for example, an electrolyte imbalance within the brain could be related to dialectic materialism. Our brilliant professor of neurophysiology who incidentally had studied in the United States, and was a

friend of Professor Cushing whom he greatly admired, would thank the student for his 'very appropriate question', duly write it down and respond that, as the student well knew (he or she usually didn't), one of the basic principles of dialectic materialism was the connection of everything with everything else within its environment ; therefore the complex physiology of the brain cell could not possibly function without perfect interaction with its intracerebral environment. Furthermore, he would add, as the student no doubt was also aware, one of the basic principles of historic materialism (the other arm of marxist philosophy) the masses were everything, the individual was nothing. So it was with brain cells, he declared audaciously, proceeding to describe the many complex mechanisms and interactions known at the time, and, to his great glee, he would lose us all. However, he would hand in his 'inclusion report' at the end of the month and silently dare anyone to challenge it. Most of our professors coped similarly and complied with this particularly annoying but generally harmless stupidity, because they had decided that the political and personal battles they faced were so many and frequently so threatening, that they had to choose wisely among them. In general, we received an excellent medical education, and I am very grateful that we were able to graduate from a reputable, well recognized university, whose true leadership, in spite of incredibly adverse circumstances, managed to maintain its dignity and academic integrity.

Once we surmounted the political and ideological hurdles and we reached the point of graduation, we were by no means out of the woods. It was not until the late sixties or even early seventies that newly graduated physicians were allowed to seek or select their own positions. Our positions were assigned to us, usually by a committee whose membership consisted of reliable comrades from among

our peers as well as some representatives of the working class from a nearby factory or collective farm. When I graduated, in the summer of 1956, I was not only married but we already had a one year old baby. She was a beautiful little girl with light brown curls and green eyes, good natured and happy, adored by her grandparents, her great grandmother Mitzi, as well as by the nanny who took care of her when I was at school and Tibor at work. We named her Daniela (Danny) for the Daniels family in England.

Our job assignment committee informed me that, despite my western orientation and reactionary background, as well as the fact that they had never considered me to be a particularly loyal or politically reliable member of our class, they had decided to take into account my family situation. Tibor was by then the head of the department of Internal Medicine at the Veterinary School in Brno, and they knew we had a child. They had decided therefore, not to send me three hundred miles away, to the eastern part of Slovakia, although they had seriously considered it, because it was a very underserved part of the country, and I deserved to be far away. However, instead, they assigned me to a position only some one hundred miles away, in the Czech - Moravian Highlands, north west of Brno.

There were families at the time who allowed the system to tear them apart in this manner. So for example there were couples each of whom would work in a different part of the country, and their child would remain at home under the care of grandparents. If both members of the couple happened to be physicians, it would be difficult for them to coordinate even weekends off call; this would result in a non existent family life, a generation of children raised solely by

grandparents or in long term, even weekly, day and night care. It is only now, forty years later, that studies are being initiated, to explore the impact of those years upon the generation in question. Even though I had no idea of the consequences we faced, if we did not comply, I decided that this was unacceptable for our family. I was staying in Brno, no matter what. Tibor's position was established and stable; I was willing to wait. We graduated in July and our new jobs started on August 15th. We made a few inquiries in an attempt to learn how non-compliance would affect our lives, for example, could I be arrested? No one knew. Apparently the crime was unheard of, there was no precedent. Tibor even traveled to Prague for information, but in general our efforts produced no answers. Finally, our solution arrived in the form of two events; one was welcome, the other was paradoxically amusing. August 15th came and went; I was very worried, but did nothing, other than to inform the medical center to which I was assigned, that I would not arrive on the appointed date. I signed my name: 'Renata Laxova, graduated pediatrician.' The latter deserves some explanation. During the previous capitalist regime, and again after the fall of the Soviet Union, the academic title awarded to physicians, in Latin, by Czech and other European universities, had been MUDr (Medicinæ Universae Doctor) or Doctor of General Medicine. This, for some mysterious reason, was also considered to be a remnant of the bourgeois reactionary era, (after all everyone was equal, we were all comrades, and addressing someone as 'Doctor' was unacceptable). So, in spite of the rigorous, classical and difficult medical education we had received, we did not receive the appropriate academic title. We were 'graduated physicians' and since I had chosen a career in pediatrics, I was a 'graduated pediatrician.'

That August, I found out that I was pregnant again. This was an additional reason that we hoped would strengthen our applications and efforts to allow me to remain in the city . The second occurrence was the receipt of a letter from the clinic to which I had been assigned which stated that they were in dire need of a physician, preferably a pediatrician, with a conventional MUDr degree. They were not interested in some less qualified paramedical person who was only a 'graduated pediatrician'. They were therefore applying to headquarters for a physician, someone to replace me. It was obvious to us that the staff (even the medical staff) at the little country clinic to which I had been assigned, were completely ignorant of the new rules about academic titles, imposed by the communists. They were interested in obtaining a physician, and since we were well aware that the wheels of the communist bureaucracy turned very slowly, we hoped that by the time they complained about the inadequate assignement and learned the truth, our baby would be born. I would have a legitimate reason to stay at home, with a toddler and a new baby. That is indeed what happened. I was left alone, I was not harrassed by more than two unpleasant official letters, to each of which I responded that I was pregnant and was therefore saving the working class valuable money by spending my future maternity leave at home instead of at their expense.

Anita was born on March 26th 1957. She was named Anna in honor of Tibor's mother and she, too was the most beautiful dark haired baby with huge, sparkling dark brown eyes that immediately captured everyone's heart. On November 1st of that year, when she was seven months old and Danny twenty seven, I started work at the Brno University Children's Hospital where I spent eleven happy and professionally productive years.

empty- nothing missing.

TIBOR

Some two years before Anita's birth, the Veterinary School announced that two new apartment buildings, with twelve apartments in each, had been assigned to it by the state, for its employees. A point system was established, based on merit, position, political reliability, number of children etc., that determined those who might qualify for one of the twenty four apartments. Tibor applied but at the time we had only one unborn child, we were politically unreliable and were living with my parents in relative luxury, in that we had one whole room to ourselves. (All these details had to be stated in the application). To my enormous disappointment we were not put on the eligible list, but at least we qualified for the waiting list (I think Tibor's position merited several points). We immediately amended our application when I became pregnant for the second time and were notified that by then, we had ascended to the top of the waiting list. This was still discouraging, because, in our opinion, there was no difference between the top or the bottom of the waiting list. Apartments and housing in general, were so unbelievably scarce, that it was unlikely that anyone of the twenty four lucky families would suddenly fall from the face of the earth or otherwise become ineligible for the precious apartment assigned to them. In contrast to the United States or Britain, academic positions in those days, under the existent circumstances did not involve transfers, or movement of staff from one university to another. Unless something unexpected occurred, or they were forcibly removed for political reasons, professors stayed within their positions, sometimes for life. So there was little hope for us and I did not relish having a second baby in my parents' three and one half room apartment. In spite of this,

we were more fortunate than many of our peers, who had no option other than to live in even smaller (two room) apartments together with their parents, occasionally even grandparents. Thus many children were raised with all the advantages and (more) disadvantages of sometimes three, frequently two generations in a confined space, within a single household. We were lucky. Three days before Anita was due to be born, Tibor was notified that the parents of one of the twenty four families were filing for divorce. Since single or divorced parents were ineligible for an apartment, the poor father of the family ,Tibor's colleague had to relinquish his place and hand over the key to the next family on the list ! We were sad that our dream could only be attained through someone else's misfortune, but the situation was not within our power. Even had we refused in favor of the divorcing couple and we did discuss it, albeit briefly, the apartment would have been assigned to the next family on the list. So, selfishly perhaps, we allowed ourselves to rejoice. I saw an apartment of our own as the solution to all our problems. This of course was not the case, but it was certainly a huge step forward in the improvement of relations between Tibor and my parents and, consequently, I hoped for less tension between Tibor and me.

In contrast to other, almost non existent, housing complexes completed under the Soviet era, our two adjacent six story high buildings were sturdy, well constructed, the rooms and the kitchen were of a decent size, with a pleasant balcony, bathroom and separate toilet. They were located on a street which ran parallell to one of the large parks in Brno, called Lužánky, and across the street from us was a huge sports stadium where the children attended figure skating lessons in winter. In the summer the stadium was converted to an outdoor movie theatre, the screen of which was visible from our fifth floor hallway window. One

summer, they were showing the American version of War and Peace with Audrey Hepburn and Henry Fonda (an acceptable movie, even for us communists). Even though I realized that its artistic value was quite inferior to the Russian version of the classic, my ears were so starved for the English language and my eyes for the sight of unadulterated luxury and glamor, that for probably fifteen evenings in a row, unless I was on call at the hospital, I would put the children to bed, hurry to the hallway window and find myself gazing at the screen in an enchanted trance.

We moved into our apartment in 1957. It was not until some years later that a few of the now well known ugly grey, prefabricated prison-like complexes that had such a depressing psychological effect upon those who were lucky enough to live in them, began to spring up in some of the city suburbs. There was virtually no construction during the Stalinist era.(I should explain that I use the term 'Stalinist era ' in a broad sense; he died in 1953, and even though his death was followed by a period of 'criticism', the subject of which was called 'the personality cult', it was directed more at Stalin himself, by his enemies, who replaced him at the head of the political machinery. It did not signify change, relief or any concessions toward freedom. Stalin was dead, so he became an easy target for 'official' criticism). During the initial stages of the regime, several building projects were initiated, only to be abandoned for lack of money, materials, man power, interest, whatever. They were left to rot and turn into mud piles. Some individuals would steal whatever materials were usable from these sites, usually under cover of darkness. Some would even 'sell' the materials to their buddies and, gradually, little weekend shacks, huts and later houses would appear in the countryside on the outskirts of cities, on the banks of rivers or

lakes. The only buildings that were completed, throughout the communist block, were few and far between and mostly they resembled the cement monstrosity that was the Lomonosov University in Moscow. The trend, also in the visual arts was socialist realism, depicting huge, 'Mr. Clean'- like men with round, bulging muscles, as they mined coal or worked, with goggles, in the steel factories. Occasionally some artists would produce huge posters of happy communist children with red scarves, waving flags and banners with slogans. It was truly an enlightening time.

On the other hand however, I cannot help but mention some of our musical experiences. While we were not allowed to travel outside our own country at all, Soviet musicians were at least permitted to perform within the Soviet block. Later, as they became world famous, they were occasionally allowed to accept invitations in the west. In the early years however, Prague and Brno were the 'sounding boards' for such musicians as David Oistrach, Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels and Mstislav Rostropovich, Galina Vishnyevskaya (Rostropovich's mezzo soprano wife). We heard one or more of them twice, sometimes three times a year. The Kirov Ballet as well as the Ballet of the Moscow Bolshoy Theatre also performed regularly, as did the Moscow Philharmonic and the Leningrad Symphony, each with their own great conductors. We heard Anny Fischer, the Hungarian pianist, the Budapest quartet, as well as Herbert von Karajan with the Berlin Philharmonic. In addition the domestic classical music scene in Czechoslovakia itself was at a high level. We were extremely proud of the Smetana and Janáček Quartets, as well as the Czech Philharmonic, one of the best orchestras in the world, created by Václav Talich, Karel Ančerl, who

emigrated to Canada after the Communist take-over, later under Václav Neumann.

School children, from the first grade onward, were taken to the opera by the school at least four times per year, and our Children's Hospital would periodically invite a few of the opera singers to entertain the patients during delightful child oriented sessions. The children, on guerneys, in wheelchairs, hooked up to intravenous drips would all participate, laugh and enjoy themselves. Everyone's blood pressure decreased by at least ten points.

Music and sports, skating, skiing, swimming, Sunday outings, were our escape from the ever present threat of persecution or summons to party headquarters for fabricated offences and crimes.

As our children grew from infants to toddlers, our family life was mostly restricted to Sunday outings. Almost every week we would take public transport to the country around Brno. We did not have a car until we had been married for twelve years, although Tibor had had a motor bicycle on which we had toured the country together, prior to the birth of our first child. During our outings, Tibor would devote himself wholly to the children. He would tell animal stories, read to them, teach about the plants and crops around us. He was also their major caretaker on nights when I was on call at the hospital. On those occasions also, there were books that only he could read to them, stories that only he told. On all other occasions however, I felt almost like a single parent. Tibor loved us deeply, unconditionally and unquestioningly. He would gladly and without hesitation have given his life for us. However he had no time for social events, no time for visits to friends, no interest in family gatherings where there were more

than just the four of us. He did not attend parent teacher conferences, the children's music recitals, school events. Of course he was interested he argued, when I complained. They were his only children, weren't they? But he just had too many much more important things to do in life. Apart from two or three truly memorable family vacations together, one in Yugoslavia, one in East Germany, after these countries opened their borders to us, we even spent vacations without him. The girls and I would go to one of the lakes nearby, or to a camp in the summer, skiing in the winter and Tibor would visit perhaps for a whole weekend, sometimes only on Sunday. He rarely chatted with other visiting fathers, even if he knew them, rarely participated in communal games at camp or elsewhere.

Sometime during the years when our children were small, I became acquainted, at the hospital where I was training, with an elderly, emaciated, very sick woman, a patient of the internal medicine ward. She was dignified, highly intelligent, quiet and uncomplaining. I started to bring her books and gradually spent a little time with her whenever I could. She turned out to be the sister of Dr Richard Feder, the only rabbi in Czechoslovakia at the time, who had recently moved to Brno from Kolín, in Bohemia. He in his late eighties, she a few years younger, they were the only survivors of a family of eighty. Both had been married before the war, both had had children. They now lived together, in one rented room, in someone else's apartment. The sister died soon after their arrival in Brno.

Rabbi Feder was adored, respected and admired by all who knew him. He was tall, gaunt, with flowing white hair, a long beard and exceptionally handsome facial features. His voice was resonant, expressive and he was erudite and

utterly non judgemental. I sometimes encountered him sitting on a bench in the park near where we lived, watching children at play. He would ask them questions about their games, their interests, with genuine involvement, humor and understanding. He was one of those people whom children approached and trusted instinctively. Most of the Jewish children in Brno, of whom there were perhaps not more than fifteen or twenty at the time, attended Hebrew lessons taught by Dr. Feder. When I suggested that we send our girls, Tibor angrily disagreed. Again he argued that these were different times, we could not look back, we needed to look forward. If by chance, I happened to be sitting in the park with Dr Feder when Tibor passed by on his way home from work, he would spend two minutes with us and leave. When I asked him why he was so bothered by this exceptionally kind man who had so much wisdom and knowledge, so much sensitive understanding for everyone, he would respond that nothing bothered him, the Rabbi was just from a 'different time, a time that had disappeared irrevocably'. I still did not understand Tibor's emotions. Later when I did, I could not believe the thickness of the shell underneath which he had so skillfully hidden them. Somehow he managed to escape from any situation (including a short conversation with the Rabbi) that might have resulted in the sudden resurfacing of a deeply buried feeling or painful memory. That is not to say that we were unhappy. He walked his self imposed tight rope, staring straight ahead at his work, his science and the future, avoiding any allusion to the past. I teetered along with him, avoiding everything that I felt could upset the delicate balance in one direction or the other. Before he was forty, Tibor had written two complete textbooks, one about sheep diseases, another on internal medicine of large domestic animals and co - authored a third.

An episode from our early life together comes to mind, that illustrates not only his drive and dedication to the exclusion of all else, but also his unusual, self deprecating interhuman relations. We had not been married long when he completed his first manuscript on sheep diseases. One of its reviewers was a professor who lived in Prague and invited Tibor to visit him sometime in the near future to discuss the manuscript. Tibor, characteristically, wanted everything to happen immediately, so a few days later, we traveled to Prague together. We did not have an appointment and arrived at the professor's home around ten o'clock one morning, straight from the railway station. Tibor was convinced that the professor would not be at home, but he wanted the satisfaction of delivering his manuscript personally. We would then spend the remainder of the day in Prague (always a delight) and would return home to Brno early next morning. I watched Tibor enter the gate leading to the professor's villa. He rang the door bell and was admitted inside by an elderly woman. I walked up a little incline above the house where there was a lovely view of Prague. Half an hour passed, then an hour. There was no telephone booth in sight and if I left to find one, I worried that Tibor would come out and be unable to find me. We had not even decided upon a hotel where we would stay. There was a little park nearby which was within sight of the house, so I wandered around restlessly for another half hour. Had he come out of the house through another exit and not seen me? Was he looking for me, as I was waiting for him? At three o'clock in the afternoon, my husband came out of the house. I had been waiting for five hours!! The professor had been at home, he explained, as had his wife; it was she who had received him at the door. The professor had wanted to go through the manuscript in its entirety, there and then. Tibor (in his convoluted thinking) had decided that if he mentioned that I was outside, they would naturally have invited

me in, probably offered lunch and that would have been a burden, an imposition as well as an unnecessary amount of work for the elderly couple. He admitted that he had not realized how much time it would take, nor that he was depriving his hosts of their own lunch (the professor had eaten as they worked, Tibor, of course refused). He was extraordinarily grateful to the professor who had devoted so much time to him, Tibor, a nobody, he said. Furthermore, he was surprised at my angry reaction when he finally appeared. He had been convinced that I would stand by him, no matter what, he could rely on me, after all I was his wife, his companion and his other half and I would always understand and perceive a situation in exactly the way that he perceived it!

Our children were delightful, sweet, loving little girls. we were proud of them and enjoyed and appreciated every moment we were able to spend together. On our outings together, Tibor would teach them about animals, crops and plants. I could never distinguish, until he taught me, between fields of wheat, oat, barley alfalfa, or anything else. Within our nuclear family, according to Tibor, I was the 'Beethoven person' and he took care of feeding and keeping us alive. One Sunday, he and the girls built a little house together in the woods, doll (or small animal) size from wood, twigs and moss. They left a note inside, asking other children who might find it, not to destroy it. From that Sunday onward, we would visit the wood house frequently, and each time we would find either an addition to the construction or notes from children on school or family outings. Some of the notes were creative, with imaginative stories about the creatures who lived in the house, others were confined to greetings. Tibor was as excited about the encounters as the children were. He also loved to draw instructive little animal pictures: for example, there was one of a newborn calf suckling milk from its

mother, its long, fragile neck stretched up toward her, tiny hind legs unsteady and splayed. It was so expressive, that I kept it for many years but unfortunately, it did not emigrate with us.

My grandmother Mitzi, in her wisdom, was the one who probably understood Tibor better than any of us. "As long as he is left alone with Renate and the girls, he will readily die for them. He is not interested in the rest of the family, he cannot stop comparing our lives with those of his parents and grandparents and he will never get over their loss. So stop trying to change him!" she would admonish my mother. In fact, Nelly's attempts to 'meddle' in our lives, as Mitzi called it, irritated Tibor and did nothing to improve their mutual relationship. Mitzi, on the other hand, would invite Tibor to her birthday celebration for example, in a calm, matter of fact manner and always add, quite nonchalantly, that she would understand if he were too busy to come. Surprisingly, he always did, even if only for a while. Although he liked and respected Mitzi, the majority of our family and friends were my family and my friends. Our children and I participated in activities together, sometimes with my parents and their friends' new families. But since I had no peers among them, and in my parents' perception, I almost belonged to the children's generation myself, we found ourselves gravitating more toward activities organized by the school or sports groups rather than those associated with our previous culture and that of my parents. On the rare occasions that Tibor was with us, the four of us would almost always be alone. It was what he preferred and for my part, I deliberately chose the route of least resistance and tension. When Danny was six, in 1961, in response to a comment that had been made at school, Tibor and I explained, for the first time that she, her sister, and of course we, were all Jewish. "I am not !" she cried, "I am a

Moravian!" But, apart from the absence of a Jewish education, culture and a peer group that would eventually perhaps have provided them with direction for the future, our girls were raised in characteristic European style. Both attended an excellent elementary school with emphasis upon languages. Daniela completed seventh, Anita fifth grade there, both having had quite intensive English and Russian classes. My mother taught them German; her lessons were never taken seriously and usually ended with sumptuous teas, treats and fun. They both had piano lessons and practiced daily, they participated in extracurricular drama, swimming, figure skating and skiing in winter. We read, we played games and we sang together. As an adult, Anita tells me, she / they did not have enough time to play and to be children. If that is the case, I am deeply sorry and wish I had done things differently; perhaps it would have been easier for all of us had we eliminated some of the activities that encroached upon play time. As I reflect retrospectively upon those days, it is probable that by exposing my children almost frenetically to every appropriate academic, artistic and athletic opportunity, I was (sub?)consciously steering them in what I saw as a 'normal', free direction, away from the ludicrous, constricting political system that was micromanaging the lives and brains of everyone of us. So, despite regrets, it is still my hope that their early basic education, however rigorous, later provided them with a firmer foundation upon which to construct new lives and face difficult transitions to new countries and new cultures. Our circumstances were atypical, abnormal and destructive. Even adults did not, could not trust one another. It was generally accepted that every fifth individual was a secret informer. The ties formed by childhood play- later peer groups, social events and growing up together with common interests, background and culture, strong attachment to roots, were all absent under the communist ideology. We

ourselves had few compatible peers. Although Tibor was withdrawn and preferred not to participate in social events, this was not as abnormal as it sounds. Social gatherings, outside the family were frowned upon and immediately suspected of having a subversive or anti - communist agenda. Families became and remained isolated. After our emigration to England, we were once more frenetically trying to adapt. Again there was little time for relaxing social activities. Today, I am convinced that, had we been in a position to offer our children a usual, conventional social life as it is understood under most free, non-totalitarian cultures, some of the pain and anguish that they have suffered as adults, could perhaps have been averted.

It is clear to me now, although during the children's early years, I was convinced of the opposite, that more than anything in the world, Tibor would have wanted a Jewish education for them. It was not until several years later that I realized and understood that he had always felt guilty. He had denied and, under the guise of his Communist ideals, had completely negated his own background. As those ideals dissolved into nothing, the guilt, naturally, turned into active defensive aggression. He would not hear of the children participating in Jewish holiday celebrations and ignored the rare occasions when they did. Apart from his love for us, it had never been easy for him to communicate intimate feelings and express true emotions. Unfortunately I was not mature enough to understand that it was his pain, unhappiness and unresolved grief that resulted in so many manifestations of overt hostility toward anyone or anything that was reminiscent of his past life. Had I had a better understanding, perhaps even that would have contributed toward a less stormy future adulthood for our children.

Tibor's emotional break through came in 1967, some twenty two years after the war. He and I were in Prague together, visiting the recently reopened sixteenth century Old-New Pinkas Synagogue on Meisel Street. The children were not with us. The synagogue with adjacent buildings and the famous old Jewish cemetery, had been reopened as a memorial museum. Today its walls are covered with names of Holocaust victims. In 1967, at the beginning of its restoration, which incidentally, is currently continuing - manually - stone by stone, the sanctuary was filled with glass cases containing collections of historical ritual memorabilia which, for some reason, the Nazis had not destroyed. The only visitors on that spring day in Prague, we were walking around, inhaling the musty, damp five hundred year old atmosphere. Tibor was holding my hand and, as we walked, I felt his grip tightening. Suddenly, he released it and disappeared. I found him in the next little room, his face to the wall, his shoulders shaking uncontrollably. We sat down on the floor together, but he would not allow me to hold or embrace him. The only words I could understand were, "Zradil jsem, zradil jsem." (I betrayed, I betrayed). I do not know how long we sat there. Finally, he stood up, and shakily he said "Let's go". We came out into the sunlit streets and walked for perhaps an hour, he staring straight ahead, responding a single, monosyllabic but emphatic "No" to my invitation to talk.

That episode was a turning point for Tibor, although none of us were aware of it at the time. It is obvious now that that would have been the opportunity for psychiatric help, at least some exploration, counseling, something. But firstly, not only were there few, if any, individuals in the world paying attention to Holocaust survivors and their problems during the sixties, secondly, we were living under the communists, for whom psychiatry served as a vehicle for the

torture, with mind altering drugs, of political undesirables. Freud and his teaching was a bourgeois reactionary forbidden philosophy. Thirdly and most significantly, even if help had been available for Tibor, he would never have accepted it, nor would he have agreed to consider the possibility that he could benefit from it. Unfortunately, the circumstances of our lives were such that Tibor was able to resuppress the emotional upheaval that he experienced that afternoon in the old synagogue. It did not resurface until after we had emigrated to England in 1968.

The deeper the political, economic and social system sank into complete neglect and stagnation, the more disillusioned even the most idealistic and convinced communists became. Tibor had lost his ideals long ago and occasionally we discussed how we might leave the country illegally. (Official emigration was impossible). We both had professions, at least one of us was fluent in English and we thought the children would learn quickly and easily. We had made one abortive attempt in 1965 when we had, surprisingly received permission for a camping vacation in Yugoslavia. With the official papers, we were able to purchase gasoline vouchers as well as the princely sum of ten U.S. dollars per adult person. Subsequently, thus equipped, we packed a tent, canned food, cooking utensils, maps and children into our car and traveled through Hungary, south into the interior of Yugoslavia, through Belgrade, part of Serbia through Monte Negro to the northwestern border of Albania. We camped on a little promontory, called Becici (pronounced Bechichi) at the southern tip of the peninsula for about five days, and as we swam in the blue Adriatic, we could gaze simultaneously at the pink Dolomite mountains above. The vacation lasted three weeks. Parts of the country were unbelievably poor, Tibor was appalled by the emaciated wandering cattle, feeding on melon peel, discarded by tourists

and tended by equally emaciated veiled Muslim women or small children. The countryside in the south was peaceful, arid and infertile, the whole was united under Tito. We returned north along the western shore line, explored the Istrian Peninsula and the wealthy westernized cities of Zagreb and Ljubljana in Slovenia. An interesting incident occurred while we were still camping in the south. A Yugoslavian agent was walking from tent to tent one morning, advertising boat rides. As I overheard him offering a cruise to the German family in the tent next to ours, I decided that the price for two adults and two children was much more than we could afford in foreign currency. I told him so, as he approached our tent. He smiled and announced that that was "the price for the Germans", Czechs were friends, he said, our tickets would be exactly one tenth of the price!

On our way home, we found ourselves on the Italian border near Trieste. A long line of cars was waiting to cross the border, some were Italians, returning home, many were German and French tourists on their way to sightseeing tours of Italy. Tibor and I looked at one another and, silently, without a word to the children, we both nodded. We joined the line of cars, most of whom were being waved on through raised barriers. After about forty minutes, we reached the gate. The guard glanced at our Czech registration plates and immediately lowered the gate. He was not even interested in our passports (we did not have a visa for Italy anyway, but we had hoped that he would just wave us through like the others). He indicated that we had to turn around immediately and continue back the way we had come. His gestures caused quite an uproar, because everyone behind us had to back up, in order to enable us to turn round. People were angry, shouting derisive remarks about Communism through open car windows. So we drove off ' in disgrace '. In retrospect we decided that we had

been fortunate, the border guards could simply have stopped and reported , even arrested us. That was a known risk we had faced consciously. On the other hand however, we knew that several friends and acquaintances had succeeded in escaping through similar routes. They had gone away on vacation and never returned home. What we did not know, was that shortly before our attempt, an agreement had been reached between the Yugoslav and other Soviet satellite governments (of which Yugoslavia was by far the most liberal) instituting new, stricter measures against any government, agency or individual who aided others in escaping from the Soviet Block. We made sure that the children remained oblivious of what might have occurred , and affirmed their belief that we had taken a wrong turn.

In January 1968, we slowly began to realize that the political situation in Czechoslovakia was changing for the better. First, the Czechoslovak ice- hockey team beat the unbeatable Russians during the world championships. The victory was much more than just a sports event. People pored out into the streets, shouting, singing, rejoicing, honking their horns. Euphoria prevailed throughout the country. Next, Alexander Dubček became the chairman of the Communist Party, proclaiming the philosophy of Communism with a Human Face. Prague university students took to the streets, demanding improved conditions for their dormitories. The latter may not seem unusual to a reader within a free country. But under Soviet rule, demonstrations of any kind, apart from the obligatory May Day or October Revolution parades, were forbidden, unheard of and even the feeblest attempt at a public manifestation or protest was punished by arrest, deportation, or liquidation Stalin-style. More musicians

from the west attended the annual Prague Spring music festival that year than previously, and suddenly, on May Day, the old familiar political parties, the Social Democratic Party, the People's Party and others, appeared in the parade, carrying their banners, as did Boy and Girl Scouts (another of the organizations that had been banned for twenty years); the former liberal periodical, Literary News was reissued, carrying a serial about the 1948 death of Jan Masaryk. Prominent political prisoners, like Rudolf Slansky and others were publicly rehabilitated and their real stories finally published, statues of President Masaryk were resurrected and decorated with flowers. It was a heady, elated feeling, we were inhaling the rebirth of freedom. Courageous little theatre companies, for which Prague had been so famous prior to and during the Nazi occupation were resuming performances, girls began to wear mini skirts, young men had long hair, churches were filled, old national rituals and festivals were reenacted and ordinary people in the streets began to smile once more. The nation was elated.

The joyous atmosphere in Czechoslovakia during the spring of that year, now known as The Prague Spring (for the music festival) of 1968, resulted almost immediately in more lively contact with the western world. More visitors were allowed to enter the country and travel outside the country became somewhat easier. In that connection, three things happened that were to change the lives of our family forever.

First, like many other Czech citizens, we applied for and received exit visas with permission to visit England as a family. Previously most people were not allowed to leave the country for the west at all. The few who did receive permission for exit visas, had to leave their spouse, children or both behind, as ransome and

assurance that they would return. Thus I had been in England alone once in 1961, and Tibor had been granted three weeks of study leave in 1963, during which he had been allowed to take eight year old Danny with him, but Anita and I had had to stay behind. In turn, she and I had attended Els and Harry's wedding in Holland, in 1964.

The 1963 visit to England by Tibor and Danny, had resulted in his purchase, in Germany, of our first car. They traveled home through East Germany and there, with a little money from England added to some royalties for one of Tibor's books which had been translated into German, he found a second hand navy blue Fiat Audi. Forgetting momentarily that he was returning through a communist country, the German Democratic Republic, to an even more fiercely restrictive dictatorship, Tibor bundled Danny into the back seat of his new purchase and set out to drive home to Czechoslovakia. They arrived at the East German border with Czechoslovakia around midnight in September 1963. They were stopped by armed border guards in an area surrounded by barbed wire. "Where do you think you are going?" they asked Tibor. "Home to Brno," he responded. "Do you have permission to enter with that car? Where did you buy it? Do you have permission to take it out of the German Democratic Republic and into the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic?" Tibor had none of the above, although he did have proof of purchase and was prepared to pay import duty. As they saw that the car had been bought for East German marks, they asked, "Are you not aware that it is illegal to possess East German marks? How did you obtain them?" I do not know what Tibor answered, but he knew that publication of his book (even though it had been published first in Czechoslovakia) in Germany, albeit East Germany was forbidden, as was its translation. It was also illegal for Czech, or

other Soviet block citizens to have western currency (i.e. the small sum he had saved from his stay in England) without official permission and the appropriate documentation from the Czech authorities. He was in a dangerous situation and could easily have been arrested there and then at the border. Instead, the guards, after endless consultations with their superiors, were instructed to confiscate the car, until such time that Tibor could produce the necessary documents which would entitle him, in the eyes of our government, to its 'legal' ownership.

Danny was sleeping, dressed in pyjamas and dressing gown, on the back seat. Tibor described later how bewildered and confused she was, when he had to awaken her, help her dress and, together, they had to find the nearest railway station and travel home by train. Neither Anita nor I were surprised when we met them at the Brno railway station, since we knew nothing about the car. It was meant to be a surprise. When Tibor recounted the whole story, I (both of us, although he would not admit it) spent several sleepless nights worrying that he would be arrested. I wished that we could get away by just sacrificing the car, rather than Tibor's or both of our freedom. He traveled to Prague to obtain documents and permission to import the car. He was informed that the only 'legal' way for a Czech citizen to own a foreign car was to receive it officially, for example as a wedding gift from relatives in the West. We wrote to Tibor's cousins in Toronto, his namesake Tibor (Tibi) and Rachel Lax, 'thanking' them profusely for their extremely generous belated wedding gift, explaining that we had received the money they had sent and, according to their instructions, Tibor had indeed purchased a car in East Germany, just as they had wished. Fortunately, Tibi and Rachel understood immediately and perfectly. They

responded by return of post that they were happy we had the car and, naming the (fictitious) amount they had given us, hoped that it was sufficient. They wished us many happy hours driving our car together with the children. For my part, I continued to worry because I could not believe that Tibor's rather reckless venture would ever have a happy ending. However, one sunny autumn afternoon, having left Brno the day before, to travel back to the German border, armed with documents and Tibi and Rachel's letter, Tibor appeared in front of our apartment building, driving our first family car, a shiny dark blue Fiat Audi. It was the first roof over our heads that truly belonged to us and we had it until 1968, when we exchanged it for a brand new dark green Skoda.

So during that euphoric spring of 1968, the loosening of travel restrictions resulted in a most important milestone, namely the possession, finally by all four of us, of valid passports and visas permitting us to leave the country for one month to visit the United Kingdom. We planned to spend our vacation there that summer. The second event occurred in the form of a visit, from Scotland, of a veterinary colleague of Tibor's, Dr John Stamp and his wife. Dr Stamp and Tibor had a common interest in sheep diseases and the Stamps spent an interesting few days comparing notes, working, visiting sheep farms with Tibor and sightseeing. As a result of that visit, Tibor received a formal invitation from Dr Stamp, to visit Scotland for three weeks during August of that year. The third event was also a visit to Brno, by the distinguished British geneticist Professor Lionel Penrose also with his wife, Dr. Margaret Penrose. They happened to be in Vienna for a meeting at the end of May and from there, they telephoned our center, enquiring whether it would be convenient for them to visit Mendel's garden, his museum and the monastery. Thus, they too, spent four or five days

in Brno. Professor Penrose gave some talks, visited Mendel and, since our center was working intensively on twin research, dermatoglyphics (palm and foot prints, a major interest of Penrose's) and the incidence of metabolic and other genetic diseases, he expressed a desire to see our work and some of our patients. The Stamp and Penrose visits overlapped by a day or two, and as a consequence, we all, including our children, spent pleasant hours entertaining our guests and showing them places of historic, scientific and cultural interest.

As the time approached for our family vacation, we realized that our plans had changed. Tibor had been invited for three weeks to Scotland and Danny, who was almost thirteen, had been invited to spend a month with Harry, my English foster brother, and his wife Els, to learn English and perhaps help to take care of their little daughter, Renate, who was just a year old, born on July 7th 1967. We decided therefore, that Tibor and Danny would go to England and Anita and I, who by chance had been able to spend a week in England earlier, with Anita's children's drama group, would spend the rest of the vacation together, first in the Czech Moravian Highlands and then in Slovakia visiting relatives. We would then fly to Prague from Slovakia, on Saturday, August 24th and surprise Tibor and Danny by meeting them at the airport when they returned home from England. We were excited and looking forward to our time together.

In the meantime, toward the end of July and the beginning of August, the political situation was becoming somewhat disturbing, much more so than we, ordinary people, realized. Dubcek and President Svoboda, a former general, perhaps the first of the Communist presidents with some education and one who had previously even been arrested by the Communists, were summoned to meetings

at various locations in our country as well as in the Soviet Union. A photograph of a smiling Brezhnev, holding and waving Dubcek's hand inside a car in Bratislava had been published not long before, which was considered quite reassuring. "We have won! We did it!" exclaimed some of the newspaper headlines in July. As time went on, the summons also included other popular, more recent members of the Czechoslovak leadership. Among them was Eduard Goldstucker, a second cousin of my father on my grandfather Polgar's side, who had attended the Kezmarok Gymnasium and lived with my father's family as a young student. He had been imprisoned by the Soviets in the fifties, now he was chairman of the powerful writer's union (always the initiators and supporters of the freedom movement) and Vice Chancellor of Charles University in Prague. He and his wife later emigrated to the south of England and we visited them one hot summer day, about a year later. Although they received us, he did not wish to have further contact. I never found out whether that was for his or our safety or whether there were other reasons. We never saw or heard from them again. I heard that he returned to the Czech Republic after 1989.

In mid August yet another meeting took place with Brezhnev, apparently inside a train, at the extreme eastern border of Slovakia (hence of Czechoslovakia) in a village called Čierna (Black) pri Čope, which bordered with the Soviet Union. The meetings were always mentioned on the news, but rarely their detailed content, since journalists were unwelcome at Communist block summits. On television, we were accustomed to seeing the leaders kissing both sides of each other's faces, Soviet-style, but we paid little attention to anything else, since we knew we would never obtain accurate information. Television news from Vienna, our daily source from the west, became somewhat less optimistic, but not even they were

aware of details. Furthermore, it was the middle of summer, it was hot, it was vacation time, who would consider serious political measures at that time of year?

Anita and I had spent a week in the Highlands. My parents had accompanied us, in the new green Skoda, to the bed and breakfast where we stayed, spent the first night and returned home by train on the Monday. We hiked, played, cycled and swam. On Saturday evening we returned home, had dinner with my parents, I took care of laundry and repacked for our second week. Anita, who was eleven, visited and played with friends for two days. Always somewhat more shy and reticent, perhaps, in her own perception, not ours, in the shadow of her elder sister, she was just beginning to form more independent friendships and relationships of her own. She and another little girl had recently appropriated a 'private' space of their own, in the basement of our apartment house. I had given her an old rug, they took dolls, books, blankets and other items to make it 'cosy'. No one was allowed inside without permission or invitation. Anita was reluctant to leave for the second half of our vacation, but I reassured her that we would soon be home again and they would be able to play in their 'house' to their hearts' content. How wrong I was !! On Monday evening, August 19th, we boarded the express train to Slovakia, accompanied to the railway station again by my parents. Anita slept in our compartment and early Tuesday morning we arrived at our first destination, a little town called Krompachy, east of Kezmarok. It was the home of dear friends, the Littmanns. Both were physicians, she a pediatrician, Bőzsinéni (Aunt Bőzsi) he an internist, Gyulabácsi, Uncle Gyula, who had lost their only son, Peter, aged twelve, to polio, just before the war. They sometimes commented, sadly, that his death had perhaps saved their lives.

They too had been in hiding and spent the war with the partisans, something that perhaps would have been more difficult with a child. My mother had made their acquaintance during her Schwester Susanna years, the village where she had lived was not far from their home and Bozsi, the pediatrician, had occasionally taken care of my mother's charge, little Peter. I had spent a summer with them after I decided to become a pediatrician too and I learnt a great deal from both. I was extremely fond of them, she was a role model for me. By 1968, she was a widow and had heart disease. I wanted her to meet Anita and vice versa, so the plan was to spend Tuesday and Wednesday with her. On Wednesday evening, we were to arrive in Kosice, even further east, for a three day visit with my Aunt Erzsi (my father's elder sister) who had been cooking, baking and preparing for our visit for the past two months, and Uncle Aladar, her husband. From Kosice, as I have already mentioned, we were going to fly to Prague, to meet Tibor and Danny.

It was with a sad heart that I went to bed, quite late on Tuesday evening, having chatted with Bózsi about old times, but also about her health which was deteriorating. She told me she rarely slept well and was glad that she had a good radio and, her comfort and joy, an excellent record player. She had been an above average pianist, Gyula had been a writer and she missed him desperately. My room was next to hers and, around four o'clock next morning, I awoke to the sounds of the radio. A male voice was speaking and I assumed that Bozsi was listening to a late night or early morning drama. "Keep calm" the voice was saying, "Do not resist the troops. This is an error. It is a misunderstanding. It will be rectified soon. Keep calm! Do not resist the troops. We beseech you! Keep calm!" As I listened, the same message continued to be repeated in various

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and the role of the accounting department in ensuring the integrity of the financial statements.

2. It also highlights the need for regular audits and the importance of having a clear understanding of the company's financial position at all times.

3. The second part of the document focuses on the importance of budgeting and forecasting, and how these tools can be used to manage the company's resources effectively.

4. It also discusses the importance of having a clear understanding of the company's cash flow and the need to maintain a healthy balance sheet.

5. The third part of the document discusses the importance of having a clear understanding of the company's tax obligations and the need to consult with a tax professional to ensure compliance.

6. It also discusses the importance of having a clear understanding of the company's legal obligations and the need to consult with a legal professional to ensure compliance.

7. The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of having a clear understanding of the company's financial goals and the need to develop a strategic plan to achieve them.

8. It also discusses the importance of having a clear understanding of the company's competitive position and the need to develop a marketing plan to increase sales.

9. The fifth part of the document discusses the importance of having a clear understanding of the company's financial risks and the need to develop a risk management plan to mitigate them.

10. It also discusses the importance of having a clear understanding of the company's financial opportunities and the need to develop a plan to capitalize on them.

versions and permutations. I decided that this could not be a fictitious radio performance. The voice sounded so urgent I knocked and entered Bozsi's room. She was deathly pale and silent tears were pouring down her cheeks. "The Russians have invaded our country," she said. "The tanks are approaching from the north and from the east."

From that moment, my brain was able to focus in only one single direction. We had to get out. Anita and I each had a valid passport, with not only an exit visa out of the country, but an entry visa to England. Tibor and Danny were still there. We had to get out and I was going to do, I was compelled to do, everything in my power to leave. I awoke poor bewildered little Anita, explained everything to her, that we were going to go to England to join her Daddy and Danny. I am sure that I appeared and sounded utterly irrational to her. We have never discussed it together. She began to cry bitterly, inconsolably. Unfortunately, our passports, my focus, the image in my brain, were at home in Brno, three hundred miles away. I left Anita with Bózsi (and the faithful Hanka who had been with her for most of her life) and ran, there and then, at five in the morning, into the center of the little town. Everything was open, everything was in an uproar. There were long lines at the food stores, the dairy, the butcher's. People were weeping quietly, standing in groups holding transistor radios to their ears. Heads were shaking and disbelief was reflected on every face. A long line had already formed at the railway ticket office. At the end of about two hours, I was able to purchase two tickets on the express train to Brno, due to leave at eight a.m.. I ran back to the house, literally grabbed Anita and took with me the image of Bozsi, standing amid the flowers in her front yard, waving, telling me not to worry, that she would be safe. I was to think only and take care of my children, the

future generation. A year later, I received a sad and lonely letter from Hanka, informing me that her beloved Bozsi had died, peacefully, at home.

The train was crowded and it seemed that everyone had a transistor. Eventually, they decided to take turns in reporting the unfolding events to the rest of us. The train was rerouted several times, and a journey that usually took some five to six hours, lasted twelve. In addition, we could see the Russian , or Warsaw Pact, convoys accompanying the train from the same direction, entering the country from the east. There were huge armored tanks and trucks carrying machine guns, with large white X shaped crosses painted on the sides. For me, it brought back memories of the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, twenty nine years previously, an image so vivid, that I had never succeeded in ridding myself of it . Radio announcers were somewhat more hopeful this time though and there were no blaring Hitler speeches. On the contrary, between announcements, the radio was playing Czech patriotic music, almost exclusively by Smetana and Dvorak. We listened with pride, as we heard that amateur radio operators were communicating among themselves, in code, and thus diverting the invading convoys and ammunition trains in the wrong directions. Many of the convoys thus found themselves heading back in the direction from which they had come. In the meantime, further coded instructions were received and all sign posts, road names, road signs and directional messages disappeared throughout the country, to be replaced by signs, considerately written or painted in the Russian alphabet, indicating "Moscow - that way", " Warsaw - that way" etc. It was comforting to think that at least the Good Soldier Schweik was still alive and well ! At one moment, the main Prague radio station announced that they were being occupied by enemy forces and would be leaving the air. Before

they did, however, they managed to communicate a periodically changing code, known only to the Czech population, which would precede further authentic broadcasts. If the code was absent, listeners were to assume that they were being addressed by the enemy. The radio stations would disappear and reappear periodically in the most unexpected locations. It was impossible for the invaders to locate or silence them for many months to come. This was a Czech amateur radio operating network which was admired throughout the world, long before the birth of the internet.

We were some twenty miles away from Brno, when we were informed, by the conductor, that the rails had been damaged by the invaders to such an extent, that the train would be unable to reach its destination. We would have to abandon the train and walk some twenty kilometers (about twelve miles) to the nearest tram terminal. By then it was eight o'clock in the evening. I had not had time to communicate with my parents, who, I assumed, were anxiously sitting by the radio or TV and waiting for news of us. Telephone lines to Slovakia had been cut, although at the time we did not know that. Later I decided that that had been a blessing in disguise, at least for us, because, had my parents known that we had left Krompachy at eight in the morning, and twelve hours later, we had not communicated, they would have been even more frantic with worry. We had no choice but to set out along the road toward Brno. There were no cars on the roads, no taxi service, everything had been stopped. Anita and I had luggage and although it was not too bulky, it was quite a burden for both of us. The passengers from the train however, behaved like a family. They organized us into groups of men , women and children and divided the luggage among us in such a way that no one carried more than he or she could manage. I still feel a

lump in my throat, as I think with gratitude and admiration, of little Anita, as she trudged, brave and uncomplaining beside me, never once asking about the distance or questioning the utterly ludicrous situation which had evolved so suddenly and unexpectedly from our pleasantly anticipated vacation together. We arrived at a tram terminal at about midnight and rode directly to my parents' apartment, where we spent the night and allowed ourselves to be welcomed, embraced, comforted and fed.

The next day my resolve had not changed, nor had it lessened. I was clearly aware that whatever my decision, one generation would inevitably and unavoidably be sacrificed. If we left, it would be my parents, if we stayed, it would be my children. I knew also that I would not, could not, raise my children within sight or under the influence of terrorist tanks and machine guns. The sacrifice would have to be my parents. They were about ready to retire, perhaps they would eventually be considered dispensable by the authorities, to be permitted to join or at least to visit us. I did not allow myself to contemplate the thought that I might never see them again, although subconsciously, the idea plagued me.

I went immediately to the travel agency, only to learn that there was absolutely no mechanism whereby anyone could leave the country. Not even foreign tourists were able to leave: there were no flights, railway tracks had been damaged on a large scale, all borders were closed for cars, hikers, bicyclists. On the contrary, all the borders were occupied by incoming troops and military vehicles. Although this was discouraging, I hoped it would not be permanent. In addition, it was uplifting to walk through the city and observe the nation 'in its finest hour'. Citizens were attempting to converse with the Russian soldiers in

their tanks, convincing them that they had 'not been invited', as Soviet radio maintained, they did not need help, there were 'no foreign subversive elements, attempting to overthrow the Czechoslovak government' (another mythical Soviet invention). When tanks began to move, people would throw themselves in front of them and form human chains. Street signs and road directions had completely disappeared overnight and questions by the Russian soldiers were answered by shrugs of the shoulders. "I don't know, but Moscow is over there. Go home!" All stores were open, free bread was being distributed to all who wanted it, milk and butter were also there for the taking, everyone was friendly, sad and everyone was talking and agreeing with everyone else. Everyone felt betrayed, but even though they portrayed defiance, they could do little in the face of machine guns and tanks. And the machine guns and tanks were going nowhere. They had orders to stay. This was not a mistake. It was , in our view, a demonstration of the Soviet Union's fear of freedom, fear of liberation, fear of loss of its satellite governments, some of whom, in true puppet form, were aiding it in its current despicable operation .

It may be helpful for the reader to realize, that the invasion of August 1968, marked the first time that a true Soviet military presence remained within Czechoslovakian borders. Although we had lived for twenty years under Soviet rule and our every move had been Soviet directed and dictated, the government had been so compliant, incompetent and incapable of any independent move, that the Russians themselves had never been visible within the country. The only exceptions were the occasional heroic Soviet workers' delegations who came to Czechoslovakia as a reward. We would encounter them once or twice a year, in our mostly empty department stores, enthusiastically buying useless trinkets

and behaving as if they were in wonderland! For them, even our non-existent economy represented the luxury of the western world.

During the next two days, Anita played with friends or stayed with her grandparents. I ran around, gathering news, discussing and assessing the situation with a few close, trustworthy friends, several of whom also wanted to leave the country. It was not possible to communicate with Tibor or the Daniels family in England (no mail, no telephones) but I assumed that Tibor would sensibly defer any decisions about returning or not returning home, until he heard from or was able to communicate with me. After all, we had agreed, prior to that wonderful spring of 1968, that we wanted to raise our children in freedom. On Saturday, August 24th, just four days after the invasion, on the day that Anita and I were supposed to have been in Prague to meet Tibor and Danny, I finally became resigned to the fact that it was not going to be possible to leave the country in the immediate future. My frantic attempts had to end, at least for the time being. Anita's and my life needed to regain some order. I cleaned the house, shopped and cooked for the first time since we had arrived from Slovakia and I brought Anita home with me.

Shortly after seven o'clock on Sunday morning, August 25th, the door bell rang. My old friend from medical school, Zora Ellinger, with whom and with whose husband I had recently also been discussing the possibility of emigration, had come to tell me that she had learned that at one fifteen that Sunday afternoon, a bus would be leaving the Brno bus station, for Vienna . Did I want to come? She, her husband Karl and their six year old daughter, Little Zora, were leaving. They had no exit visa, but they would risk crossing the border without it. She,

Zora, had cousins in Vienna, who would put us up for the night and afterwards, I could get in touch with England, as I wished. Their family would probably stay in Austria, since they could speak the language and it seemed nearer to home and her parents. Karl was an orphan from the war and had been through several concentration camps. Without a moment's hesitation, I responded that Anita and I were coming.

I called my parents, I called Mitzi. "I will never see any of you again" she said. I told her that that was impossible, of course, we would all be reunited, in the near future, I thought. This would not go on forever. We would come back, or she would come and visit us. Mitzi, as always, was right. She died, unexpectedly and suddenly at a time when my parents happened to be visiting us in England. I received a phone call from the post office, informing me that a telegram had arrived, in a foreign language, from Czechoslovakia. Could they please spell the message for me, would I understand the language? My mother was standing in the kitchen, cooking, as she watched my face change. The post office clerk was spelling each letter in Czech: " G - R - A - N - D - M - A - D - I - E - D - S - U - D - D - E - N - L - Y - S - T - O - P ". Later we were told she had had a heart attack. She had not been sick, to anyone's knowledge, and of course she could have died of a sudden heart attack. She was eighty one. But we could not help wondering whether perhaps she had wanted to give my parents the freedom to decide whether or not to remain in England with us. She had the knowledge and it would not have been uncharacteristic.

I packed a little suitcase that Sunday morning, full of absurdly stupid and unnecessary things, a few clothes, a book of silly Czech jokes (why? they were

not even funny). It did not occur to me to pack a sheet, pillow case, towels; I found nothing at all that was useful when I finally unpacked it, some days later. I assume Anita and I had night clothes, toileteries, I do not know and I do not remember. I wonder if she does. It is obvious that, although convinced that I was acting rationally, sanely and as a result of a great deal of consideration, this was not the case. How does one pack one's whole life into a small suitcase in one hour? How does one think, during uprooting number three, about saying good bye yet again, perhaps forever, to all that is familiar, to all that is dear, to all those one loves? My parents, as always in times of crisis, were spectacularly supportive and helpful. They came to the house, accompanied us to the bus station and, despite the tears and fear of the unknown, said 'good bye', as if we were going on vacation again.

Yet it was my parents once more, who subsequently bore the brunt of the persecution and prosecution for our 'illegal' emigration. Through part of 1969, the Czech government attempted to maintain its somewhat more liberal policies. However in late 1969, early 1970, the Soviet clamp-down became uncompromising and even more suppressive than previously. Not only did those who had remained outside the country 'illegally' receive prison sentences (Tibor and I were each sentenced, in absentia, to two years in prison) but close relatives of such 'criminals' were held responsible for their actions and, more importantly, their property. So for example, after Anita and I had left so suddenly, my mother and Mitzi moved furniture and valuables out of our apartment. Two years later, my parents were forced to produce an inventory of our property; we were traitors and enemies of the state and our property should have been confiscated and handed over to the state. My parents had failed to do that,

therefore they were held liable for having 'stolen' our furniture, refrigerator, etc., TV, as well as our new car. They were forced to make monthly payments to the state in the estimated value of the contents of our apartment. I never found out how large the payments were or of what duration. I know that they had to provide proof that they had fulfilled these obligations, before they were allowed to visit us in England some years later.

There was not one, but four buses standing by that Sunday afternoon, all headed for Vienna. The noise, the chaos, the good byes were reminiscent of, but different from my previous departure from my parents in 1939. This time, I tried hard not to cry. We would see one another soon, I insisted repeatedly, and I had to believe it. The drivers were admitting everyone onto the buses, who paid for a ticket. Passports, visas were irrelevant. They were determined to take as many people out of the country, as wanted to leave. Finally, the buses moved away from the gates. We drove south and as we approached the Czech-Austrian border, we again encountered long convoys of tanks and trucks with white X shaped crosses painted on the sides. They were moving toward Brno, in the opposite direction from the one we were taking. Karl, Zora's husband, who was sitting in the seat in front of us, turned and said. "Take a good look at them. Don't ever forget them. They are 'gegen Heimweh'!" (an antidote for home-sickness). I never forgot that phrase. It helped me through many difficult situations in our future life.

The border guards on the Czech side waved us through. They asked for no papers, passports, just wished us well and hoped we would all be able to come home soon. "Just tell them all out there, what's going on here!" they called after

us. The Austrian border crossing was equally simple. They welcomed us, did not ask for visas or passports either, and gave each child a package of chocolate candy with a picture of the Alps, as a 'welcome to Austria' gift. I think Zora's cousins met us at the bus station in Vienna and took us to their home, where I immediately requested permission to call Harry and the family in England. They were living in Lowestoft in Suffolk at the time and Tibor happened to be with them when I called. "We knew you'd get out", said Harry in a very matter of fact way. "We're waiting for you!" Tibor was less calm. He wanted to know when and how we would arrive. I told him I did not know yet, I needed to borrow money from somewhere, obtain tickets, either for a plane or the train. So I asked him to be calm, to stay with Harry and Els, take care of Danny, we would call as soon as we arrived in England. I hoped it would be within a day or two. The next day, one of the kind cousins took me into town where there were already several centers organized for Czech refugees. There were also camps. Many people had taken advantage of the lifting of travel restrictions in Czechoslovakia that summer and had found themselves outside the country, when the Russians invaded. The camps were set up to house the hundreds, even thousands, who needed time to decide whether or not to return to their homeland. They were aware that once they returned, it would not be easy, under the Russians, to leave again. So Austria generously housed and helped many Czechoslovak citizens during the end of summer and fall of 1968. At one of the centers in town, I was asked to explain what I needed, what my intentions were and how many people had emigrated with me. I produced my passport, with its British visa and replied that all I needed was to borrow enough money to get my little girl and me to England. I received a loan, there and then, without argument, or even a guarantor. (We returned it in its entirety within six months, but heard from many

others who had received similar aid, that they had no intention of returning it. It was not expected and the Austrians could afford it, they said).

The loan was exactly sufficient for two train tickets, including the Channel crossing, to London. Anita and I left Vienna that evening and arrived in London, once more at Victoria Station, in the afternoon of the next day. I called Harry who told me that Tibor (characteristically) had been sitting at Heathrow Airport for the last two days and nights, watching every flight from the Continent, in case we were on it. He had insisted that I had told him we would arrive, in two days, by air. I had said no such thing, I had no idea how and when we would arrive, but Tibor heard what, I assume, he was hoping to hear. Harry and Els had communicated with him, from Lowestoft, by periodically having him paged throughout the airport! Tibor always tried, desperately hard, never to be a bother or, what his tortuous mind called a burden, to another person. His two day vigil at Heathrow Airport was an illustrative example, as was the water pouring through the floor of Els and Harry's bathroom to the ceiling of the room below, from Tibor's laundry which he had washed by hand in the middle of the night, and hung up over the bath tub. He had refused to allow Els to add his few items to the load she had had in the machine that very day. Harry, on the other hand, was surprised to find a roughly three by five by six feet deep ditch at the bottom of his garden, instead of the delicate flower bed , which, out of kindness and in response to Tibor's ardent requests for something to do, he had asked Tibor to weed !

Tibor never changed. He remained fiercely independent throughout his life, always refusing help, even, sadly, with his last breath. Minutes before he died

(the ambulance was on its way) he insisted on wearing a clean shirt and would not permit me to help him put it on. I only hope Harry and Els forgave him. I did.

Our first days in England were chaotic and frightening. We spent a few days with Harry and Els in Lowestoft and initially left the girls with them. Harry, with characteristic wry humor, commented that in the future, he would warn his own children to expect an invasion by some Polgar / Lax family refugees at sometime in their lives, since this seemed to be becoming a habit with each new generation! For a period of time that fall, the girls attended Lowestoft Grammar School. Harry and Els had friends who taught there and everyone's extreme kindness and understanding were later instrumental in helping us to transfer them to an equally good school, called Francis Bacon Grammar School, near our future home in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, north west of London.

My daughters' situation was yet another 'deja vu' impression for me. Although a little older than I had been, here they were, in a strange country, speaking a strange language, without friends, in a completely unfamiliar school environment. I have never forgiven myself for what, to them, must have seemed like a complete lack of acknowledgement of their situation on my part. While my own experience was never far from my mind during those early days, I realized that first, they had both parents within communicating distance and we saw one another frequently. Secondly they were not alone, they had one another. Thirdly they were older and perhaps less bewildered than I had been. This of course was wrong. At eight, perhaps I had been able to take things more for granted, to accept them with less difficulty than they, at eleven and thirteen. They thought

more deeply about home, each had already formed personal relationships which they missed. Danny later talked about her seventh grade class with whom she had been on an end of school year trip, just before she left home. It had left a lasting impression and longing within her and she admitted that the thought of returning home to her friends and to all that awaited her, had sustained her through the homesickness she had naturally felt while on what we all thought was a long but temporary vacation in Lowestoft. Little Anita, on the other hand, had inherited Tibor's inability to express her feelings and emotions. She captured everyone's heart with her beautiful shining brown eyes and her smile. Rarely did anyone realize what she was thinking and how she was feeling. She and Danny were (and still are) close and I often wonder what they discussed together on the long bus ride home from school, during the weeks that, having bought our future little house in St. Albans, we were still living in London and they were commuting. I am so painfully aware how almost frantically busy Tibor and I were, attempting to find a basis upon which to build a new life. I know that the children were emotionally alone and isolated. Tibor's philosophy, his Holocaust mentality, so common in so many survivors, precluded psychological exploration, even discussion. The children had "enough to eat, a roof over their heads, they were warm and loved and - above all - (his own greatest defense mechanism) - their parents were alive and with them!!" What more could they possibly want or need? I felt, I knew some of what they were going through, I had fewer emotional handicaps (perhaps) than Tibor, but not only did my own experiences probably interfere with my exploration of theirs, but I, too, was trying desperately to convince myself, my parents, my friends and family, the girls and Tibor included, that we had done the right thing, we were building a new life and we were, we had to be, happy!!

In addition of course, both Tibor and I were attempting to establish ourselves professionally, he at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in London, I at the Kennedy Galton Centre at Harperbury Hospital in Radlett, Hertfordshire. Tibor, to everyone's amazement and admiration, had taken and passed the incredibly difficult membership examination of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, just before Christmas 1968. His English was not good, the exam was in essay form, yet his knowledge was such, that the examiners must have recognized his exceptional expertise. He was pleased of course, but rarely discussed this extraordinary success, which had eluded eight out of ten other (British) candidates at the same time.

Although Harry and Els lived in Lowestoft and Auntie Edna and Uncle Harry were back in Morecambe and Heysham, where we had spent the war, Tibor and I were aware that in view of our respective professions, we would most probably find employment in or near London.

One Friday morning, shortly after our arrival in England, I decided it would be polite to call Professor Penrose since, when we had met him and his wife in Brno, just three months previously, he had asked me to do so, if ever I came to England. I informed him that we had escaped from Czechoslovakia and, not unlike Harry, he responded quite prozaically, that they had wondered when they would hear from us. Together with his wife, Dr. Margaret Penrose, they invited us to their home in Golders Green, for what we thought would be a polite cup of tea and perhaps a chat. They met us at the door, both wearing overcoats. To our amazement, instead of a handshake, they handed us their house keys, the only

set, since, characteristically, as we later learned, the spare keys were nowhere to be found. They were on their way for a weekend in the country, they explained, but wanted to see us settled in, before they left. In a completely dazed stupor, we followed them as they took us through the house. Margaret showed me how to prevent the hot water system from exploding and the contents of the linen closet from toppling over. She also gave me instructions for Mrs. Lee, the cleaning lady who was apparently expected to arrive at the house at the beginning of next week. Professor Penrose (Lionel) rather nonchalantly provided Tibor with what he called "a few useful telephone numbers". Subsequently we found that they enabled us to apply for permission to stay in Britain, to obtain work permits and alien cards. The children were given books and within five minutes, were engrossed in some of Lionel's hand made wooden puzzles. Not more than fifteen minutes after we had rung their door bell, we found ourselves waving from the window of their home, as they breezily and cheerfully left for their weekend in the country.

How many people are there among us who would be willing to entrust their homes, in their absence, to practically complete strangers arriving on their doorstep from a foreign country? The Penroses gave us two rooms in their lovely house, one for us, one for the children. It was they who helped us purchase our first little house, it was they who suggested St. Albans, a delightful medieval town north west of London, with culture, music and excellent schools, it was Lionel who offered me my first job and helped Tibor obtain his. He became my boss, my mentor, my idol. My gratitude and that of our family knows no bounds. An attempt to express it has been published elsewhere in a personal little memoir (ref).

One episode that occurred during the fall of 1968 when we were still living with the Penroses, bears mention here. It somehow represents to me the completion of a circle. One evening, the Prof., as we affectionately learned to call him, knocked on the door of our room and invited me to his study. Someone wanted to meet me, he said. As I entered, he introduced me simply by my first name. A tall, slender woman came toward me with outstretched arms and, with tears in her eyes, embraced me warmly. I knew I had never seen her before, nor did I recognize either of her two male companions. "So fortunate, my dear," she said, noticing my completely bewildered and uncomprehending facial expression, "that Lionel has such a good memory. You see, I remembered the 'Renate' part, and wondered whether it could possibly be you, but it was Lionel who knew your maiden name and so, of course it *had* to be you!" I learned that the three visitors, like Lionel, his parents and family, were longstanding members of the Society of Friends (Quakers). It was they who in 1939, perhaps in response to Nicholas Winton's endeavors, had published the booklet with pictures of children seeking refuge from Hitler occupied Europe, and appealed to their membership for help. Twenty nine years later, Professor Penrose and his friends had recognized my somewhat uncommon name, remembered the booklet and realized that I had been among the children for whom a British home had been found during World War Two and whose lives they had helped to save.

Tibor was never happy in England. He had received a research grant from the Burroughs Wellcome Foundation and worked at the Field Station of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in Potters Bar, not far from St.Albans where we lived. It was also within easy driving distance of my own place of work, the

Kennedy Galton Centre , established within the grounds of Harperbury Hospital, a residential institution for people with mental retardation, in Radlett, Hertfordshire, by Lionel Penrose, after his retirement from the chair of the Galton Laboratory at University College London. The girls were accepted into the first and third forms respectively of Francis Bacon Grammar School in St.Albans and, with the Penroses' guidance, we had purchased a mortgage for the little house in which we lived. It had a relatively large living room downstairs and three bedrooms upstairs, each of which we furnished as living rooms also, so that the girls could entertain friends in privacy, without having to sit in bedrooms. We even put a piano into Danny's room, an unprecedented request, according to the furniture movers. Both Tibor and I had an initial salary of about two thousand pounds sterling per year. It enabled us to repay any loans we had received from friends and family for our beginnings, to pay the mortgage and live a relatively 'normal' life. On paper then, we appeared to be settling in and I made sure that that was how it seemed in my frequent correspondence with my parents at home. We discovered old friends from Brno in London, from before the war, even distant relatives whose older generation hailed from Kezmarok, my father's birthplace, as well as some distant second or third degree cousins from Tibor's family.

Tibor however, was restless. Outwardly he worked hard and conscientiously and together, with or without the children, we accepted occasional invitations to friends and colleagues, but I sensed in him an inner turbulence that was difficult to define. For example, one early spring evening in 1969, we were driving through the pleasant green countryside to dinner with some of the rediscovered old friends. Always eager to appreciate the feeling of ordinary, uneventful well

being, I commented how fortunate we were, and how our lives seemed to be becoming normal and contented. Our children were healthy, busily doing their homework in our own little house, we both had work that we enjoyed, and here we were driving together, on a lovely evening to visit friends. Staring straight ahead, his eyes on the road, Tibor responded that there was no point in wasting an evening talking about nothing. He had no interest in 'these people' he said, and I should not have accepted the invitation.

His disinterest in people became increasingly obvious. It almost seemed as if he were afraid of forming attachments and preferred to withdraw. Initially I ascribed his distance to a distorted form of jealousy. After all, my parents had survived and his had not. As in Brno, in London, most of our old and new friends were my friends and many, understandably asked about my parents. Sometimes we discussed old times - my / our old times. I begged him frequently to include his own colleagues and acquaintances in our activities, he refused. "We have nothing in common," he would respond. But it appeared that he had nothing, wished to have nothing, in common with people from our own background either. When I invited his distant cousins to our home, he could not do enough in preparation. He bought a store full of meat and other supplies, continuously worrying that I would not have enough food to offer them. The visit itself, however, was as unsuccessful, for Tibor, as all the others. We made small talk, found few topics of mutual interest and again it was only I who attempted to create a congenial atmosphere. Tibor devoted himself to offering food and wine but said little. He was unenthusiastic about further contact and the relationship, if ever there was one, gradually petered out.

On the other hand, he could be a charming, witty and interesting companion and many people in England found him so. Those who did however, those with whom he joked and whom he charmed, were rarely people who were important or close to us. Gradually I realized that his withdrawal, even his covert hostility, applied only to those by whom he felt threatened, those to whom he feared, subconsciously, he might become attached, those to whom the girls or I were attached and who were attached to us. In other words, they were the people from our (his) past, families whose life and culture reminded him of what he still could not bear to be reminded of, his own life before the war. I assume that his fear of loss was greater than his ability to seek closeness, so he chose to withdraw.

Tibor's tortuous complexity resulted in serious conflicts for all of us. His love for us was unconditional, unquestioning and complete. He would readily have given his life for us. That, in his mind, was a basis so firm and indisputable that no further explanation was necessary when he began to insist that the girls participate in Jewish activities in St. Albans. His attempts unfortunately were so clumsy that they antagonized rather than attracted his daughters. After all we were in touch with friends from the old culture, who would happily have included our girls in their invitations, holiday celebrations etc. But Tibor rejected them. They were threatening to him, they were my friends, their family traditions probably hit too close to home.

He found an unknown, unsuitable (in my opinion) group of young adults. Danny and Anita occasionally took care of their children on weekend evenings. They would relate how the parents or sometimes the mother alone, would come home

drunk, in the early hours of the morning. Tibor's guilt was so destructive and his knowledge of people so limited, that he became indiscriminate. Friends from the old country were threatening. As a result all that remained were new unknown Jewish groups, suitable or not. All had the same purpose, he maintained and taught the same values. He told me once, in a 'weak' - his word - moment that it was his fault that the girls were ignorant of their roots and their background and he was doing what he could to remedy his failures. Both the girls and I, his mate, his soul (one of his Czech endearments for me was "my little soul") who should be supportive and helpful, were doing our best to obstruct his attempts. He succeeded in antagonizing the girls, particularly when he continued to suggest that they socialize with what they saw as strange and to them embarrassing groups of unknown people. They were teenagers, they had interests, they had worked incredibly hard and were excelling at school, having learned the language and tried to form new friendships. One does not need a degree in psychology to understand the difficulties they faced and overcame, courageously, without complaint. I always told Tibor how lucky he was to have children who were mature enough to at least vaguely understand his problems, sometimes even better than I. They loved him deeply, they respected him and they, we all, had fun together when sensitive issues were not being discussed. Subconsciously, they were aware of his emotional torture, his grief. "Our Dad (Tatka) he's sort of different from other people." They took his angry outbursts at their 'disobedience' with a grain of salt, and, although there is no doubt that he hurt them, they would forgive and try to forget. If only he had been gentler in his psychological approach, more sensitive. "They are my daughters ! " he would exclaim, "no one knows better than I what is good for them, what they need; I do

not have to explain everything,. There is nothing to explain. No one loves them as I do. Not even you, otherwise you would support me!" That hurt too.

Finally Tibor decided that England was 'too small' for us as foreigners. The veterinary profession in particular was different from the medical profession where every third professor or scientist had a foreign accent. I felt perfectly at home in the now familiar environment of my workplace, as well as in cosmopolitan London among old and new friends. It was not merely knowledge of the language. I have always been a 'people' person. Even in my work, people, rather than science, have played the most important role. Veterinarians, on the other hand, particularly in and around London, were a closed community. They were very friendly, eager to help and they had done a great deal for Tibor. But theirs was very much a 'hail fellow, well met' tweed suit wearing old boy network and Tibor did not fit in at all. Of those who lived in the vicinity of London, most were wealthy, had country homes, they bred dogs and horses and they hunted. Like James Herriott, Tibor was a large animal veterinarian, but he was also a meticulous scientist at heart. He was not willing to give British veterinarians, nor Britain a chance. He began to talk about America, how much bigger and more magnanimous a country it was for foreigners and for people with strange accents, like his. Neither the girls nor I took him seriously. Nothing was further from our minds than another move, yet another uprooting. But Tibor, as was his wont, brooded and analyzed, immersed into his own private thoughts. He would then emerge, having arrived at a *fait accompli*, from which he would rarely be dissuaded. So it was on this occasion.

In the late spring, early summer of 1971, after we had been in England some two and a half years, the British Postal Service happened to be on strike. The phones were working however. One Saturday morning he received a phone call from a Dr. Tjalma, a Swedish veterinarian who had visited Tibor in Brno and knew Tibor's department as well as his work. He was calling to inform Tibor of a teaching position for an associate professor of Internal medicine at the Veterinary School at the Colorado State University in Fort Collins. Since there was no mail, Dr Tjalma said, Tibor would have to call Fort Collins, if he were interested, and communicate with the head of the department. He, Dr. Tjalma, had spoken very highly of Tibor to the head as well as members of the staff there. Tibor called Fort Collins and, over the telephone, he accepted the position.

We begged, we pleaded, we wept. He was stubbornly adamant. He was doing it for us, he said, for our lives. His didn't matter any more. Ours, above all, the girls' future did. He had to do it because he loved them. I believed him, his intentions and his convictions were utterly sincere. In his mind, he could have had a relatively easy life doing research in London and pottering in our garden in his spare time. As it was, he was choosing an initially lonely, very difficult path, in yet another strange country, with strangers. He was compelled to do this, he said, out of love for us. Because, once he had succeeded in building a life for us in the United States and we joined him, we would see that that was the world for us. We would see that he had been right. Was he punishing himself for what he saw as neglect of his filial as well as his paternal duty? Was he running away? Or was it both of the above?

Some weeks later, he resigned from the Royal College, much to everyone's astonishment, and took a few locum tenens positions for neighboring veterinarians who happened to be on vacation during the time he was waiting for his visa to come through. One of these happened to be within the practice of the veterinarians who served Queen Elizabeth II in Windsor. Consequently, one Sunday morning, Tibor was called to Windsor Castle, by the Queen's Footman, to deliver the puppies of one of Her Majesty's corgies. The Queen herself sent her regrets to the veterinarian, for her absence, she was in church at the time! How fitting that that happened to be the last service Tibor performed in Great Britain.

On July 3rd 1971, Danny, Anita and I took Tibor to Heathrow Airport. Blinded by tears, the girls and I watched for a long time, as his plane veered westward. He arrived in the United States on July 4th 1971. Five years later, during our country's bicentennial celebrations, Tibor became one of its most devoted and loyal citizens. The four of us were together.

THE END

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND DOCUMENTS

1. Hayek - Jokl family tree

2. Polgar family tree

3. A. Nelly at age 18, 1921;

B. Selma, her mother, age unknown;

C. Mitzi and Alois in a spa in 1929.

4. A. Omi Hirsch, paternal grandmother of

B. Uli and Francie, Nelly's best friends and source of support;

5. Document confirming Mitzi Jokl's (my grandmother's) religion as Jewish;

6. Meine lieben Prinzessinen! - copy of (original) letter

7. Section of alphabetical list of children in Kindertransports from
Czechoslovakia;

8. Instructions to parents from Nicholas Winton's British Committee for children
in Prague;

9. A. Miki, Renate and Nelly, last days in Prague

B. Nelly and Renate, last days in Prague

C. Photograph sent to George Lansbury and published in Quaker newsletter;

10. - 12. Examples of first letters, one Czech, two English from England, Sept.39

13. Letter from Hagbard Jonassen

14. Copy of (original) 25 word lettergram

15. A. The castle in Jaklovce;

B. Picture of Schwester Susanna in Jaklovce with Baby Peter

C. Little Peter as a toddler

16. Susanna Schlesinger's permission to travel, issued by the Gestapo, 1944

17. Mikulas Potocny, identity card

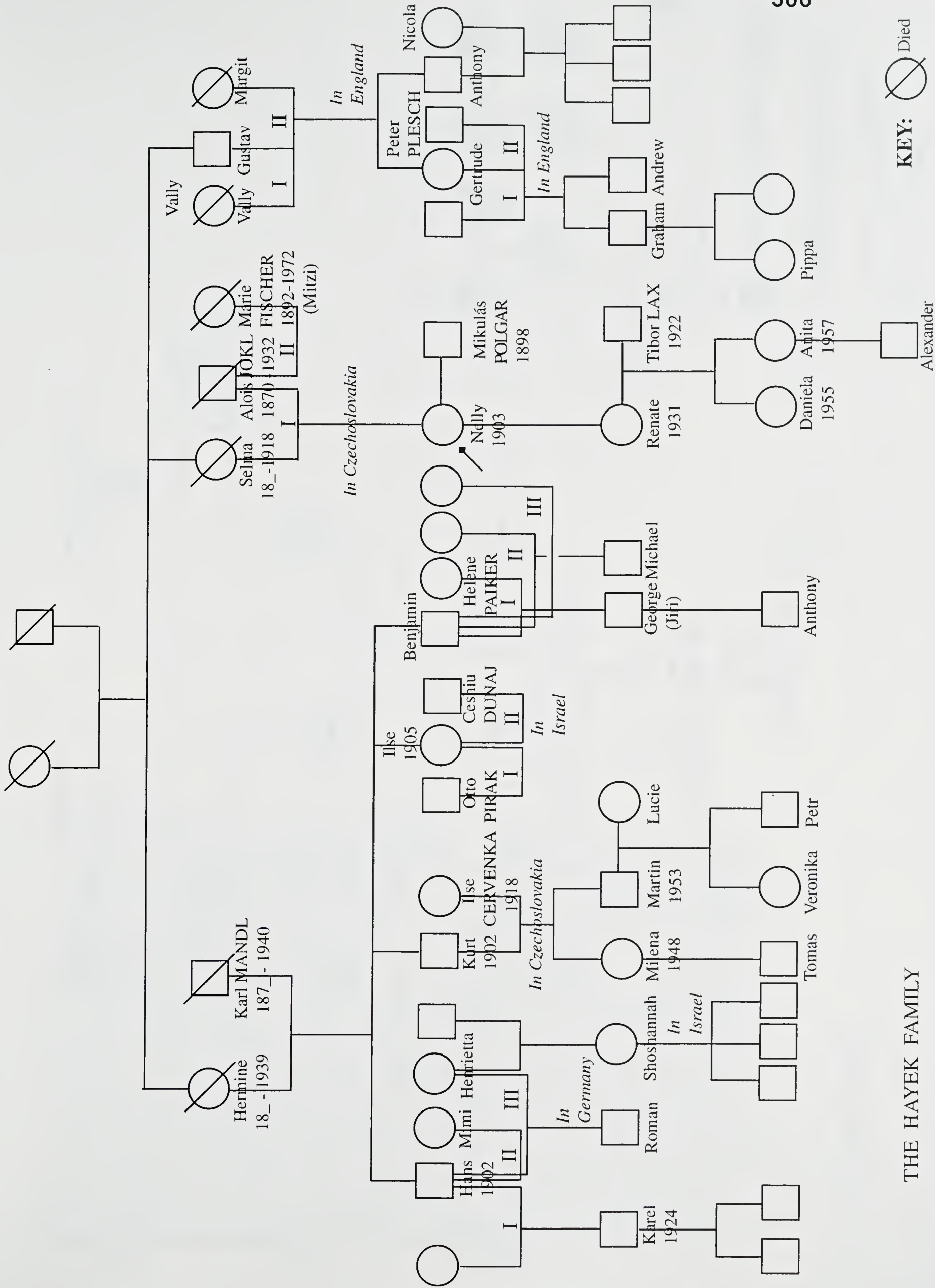
18. Mikulas Potocny: birth certificate;

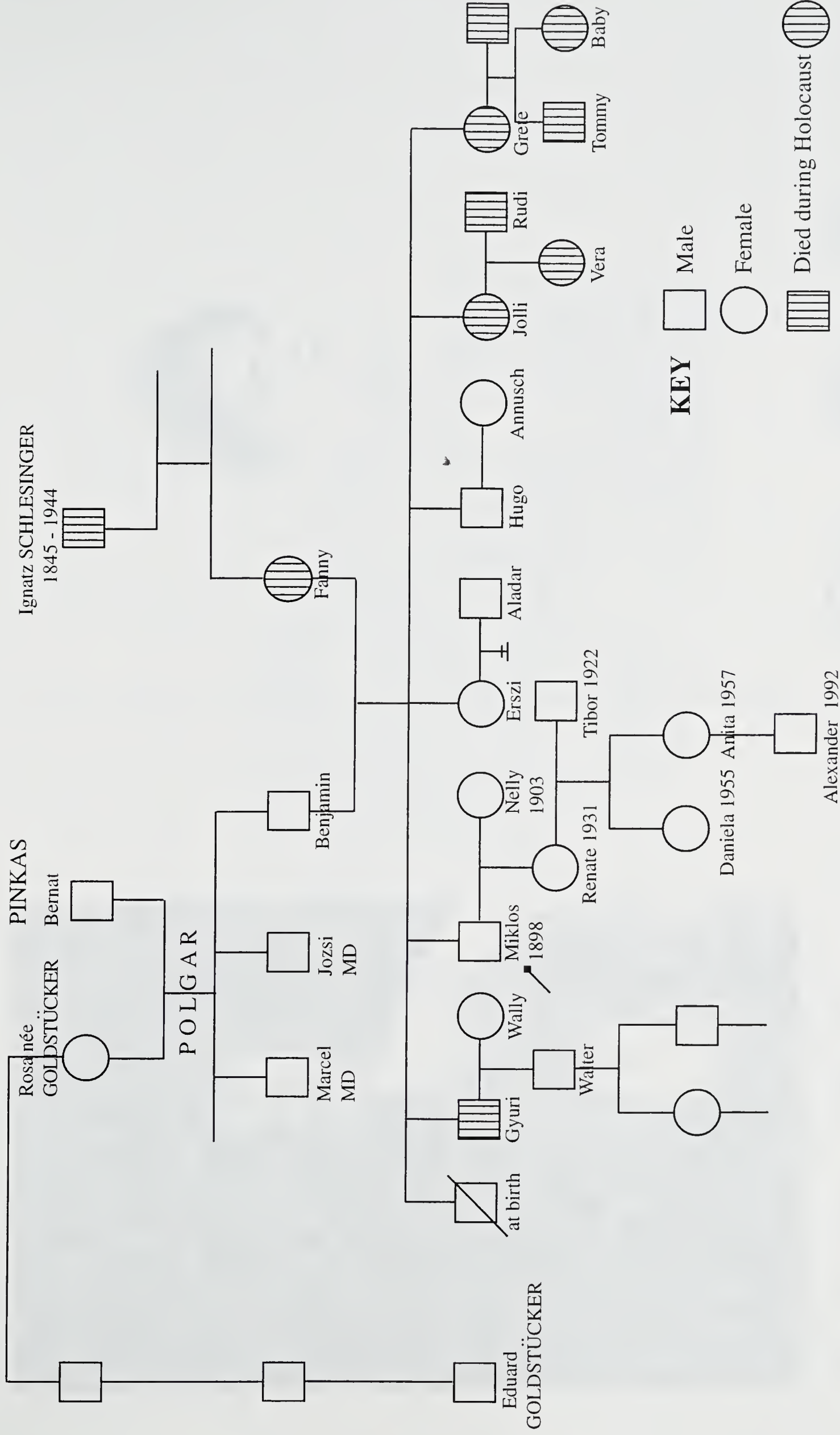
19. Nelly and Miki after the war.

20. Copy of (original) clipping w. picture of Harry interviewed by paper before visit to Czechoslovakia, 1947;

21. Tibor in his office at the Veterinary School in Brno, in 1967;

22. Rabbi Richard Feder, 1875 - 1970.





THE POLGAR FAMILY



B. A. NELLY AGED 18

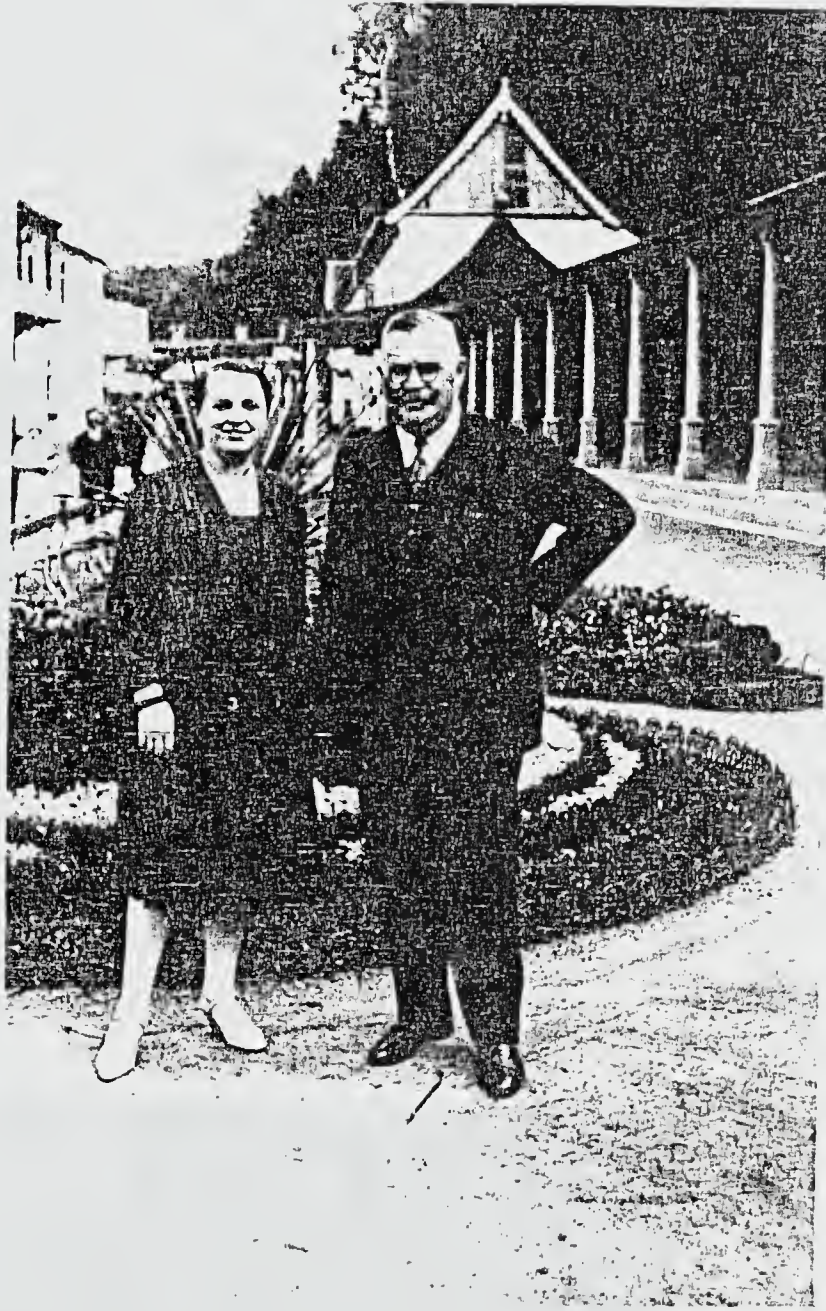


Leid. Freya

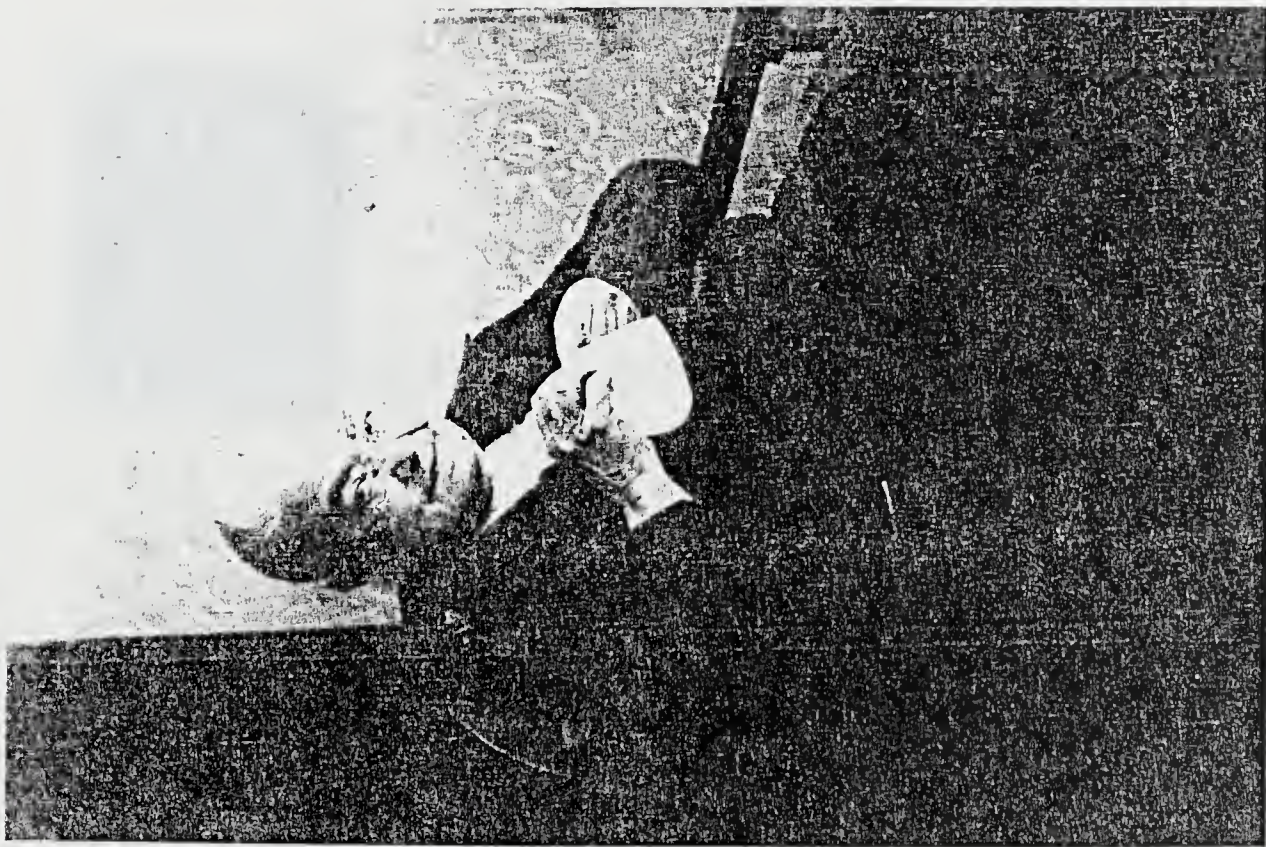


WIEN
II. KLEINE SPERGASSE 3.

B. B. SELMA, AGE UNKNOWN



B.C. MITZI AND ALOIS IN A SPA, 1929



4 A. Mrs. Hirsch



4 B Uli (R) and Francie (L) Hirsch

Ministerstvo Vnitra, odbor VI/4, Praha IV, Loretánská Ul. 6

C. j. A-4815-73131 VI/4.

V Praze dne 13.3.1946

Kolek
Kč. 8.-
razitko
Ministerstva
Vnitra

Ministerstvo vnitra v Praze osvědčuje tímto, že

J o k l Marie, nar. 2.1.1893 v Sentících

má ve sčítacím archu sčítání lidu republiky Československé ze dne
1. prosince 1930

zapsanu národnost: židovskou.

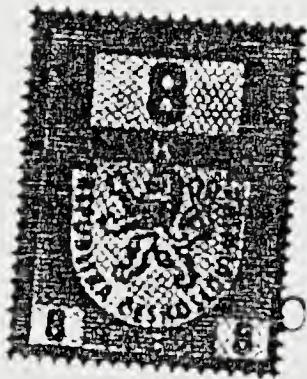
/ Brno - čp. 153, /

Za ministra:

L.S.

Dr. Drmala

Ministerstvo Vnitra
kulaté razitko



Opis tento souhlasí s prvopisem, archivován
opatřeno kolkem a Kčs
OKRESNÍ KANCELAR
OKRESNÍHO SOUDU CIVILNÍHO PRO BRNO-MĚSTO

dne 13. VI. 1946



5. DOCUMENT CONFIRMING
MITZI'S RELIGION
AS JEWISH

LIST OF CHILDREN BROUGHT OVER UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE CZECH CHILDREN'S SECTION
ON TRANSPORTS FROM PRAQUE. THIS LIST IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SECTION'S RECORDS

7. Section of alphabetical list
of Kindertransports

OF 15th FEBRUARY, 1940.

CZECH CHILDREN'S SECTION

Page 18

NAME	CHRISTIAN NAME	SEX	NO.	BIRTH-DATE	CHILD'S PRESENT ADDRESS	GUARANTOR'S NAME AND ADDRESS	RE-EMIGRATION LIABILITY	REMARKS
POLGAR	Renato		5863	15. 7.31	with guarantor	Harry Daniels, 115 Snowden Avenue, Flixton, Lancs.	Personal Guarantee	
POLINECER	Gerda		5036	9. 7.27	with father at the Czech Trust's Hostel, The Rock, Kelfgate. <i>Edinburgh Castle.</i>	formerly Reading Refugee Ctce., now Czech Trust Fund.	Czech Section	Case pending, as reported to Czech Trust Fund, 100 W. 4. Karau, 1000 Dept., 10.2.1940. (C.T.)
POLLAK	Maria		7570	4.12.23	Whittingehame School	G. G. Gilbert, 16 Eaton Court, London, N.W.3.	Personal Guarantee	at Whittingehame Farm school.
POLLAK	Marietta		8166	22. 7.25	with guarantors 40 Mrs. L. E. Johns, Glendene, 73, Pinner Road, Barnet, N.4. with guarantor	Society of Friends, Cadbury's Hostel, Windmill Cottage Hostel Manor House, Northfield Birmingham.	Czech Section	313
POLLACK	Paul		12089	28. 5.26	with guarantor	W. H. Simmons, Baldhu Viarage, Truro. Ctce.	Cornwall Refugee	
POLLACK	Stella		7342	10. 4.26	with guarantor 10 Mrs. Peckham, Springfield (other) Hall Place, Cranleigh, Surrey	Dr. Gillison, 133 Lower Road, S.E.16.	Czech Section	
POLLITZER	Vera		7797	5.10.24	with guarantor	Berta Drake, Luckley, Wokingham, Berks.	Personal Guarantee	
POMERANZ	Ruth		7353	4.10.24	12. Englem Farm, <i>Biggleswade</i> near Ashford, Kent.	Movement.	Youth Aliyah.	at Youth Aliyah farm school.
POPPER	Olga		5578	9. 2.29	c/o Mrs. Englem "Inverbog" 20 <i>Lyons</i> Lyons <i>Lyons</i> Dorking, Surrey.	Czech Section.	Czech Section.	
PORGES	William		1626	5.12. 26	Cliftonville ? School, Wexford.	Otto Wambach, 35 Netherhill, Glasgow	Deposit	at Cliftonville School

BRITISH COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN IN PRAQUE

HON. SEC. T. R. M. CREIGHTON

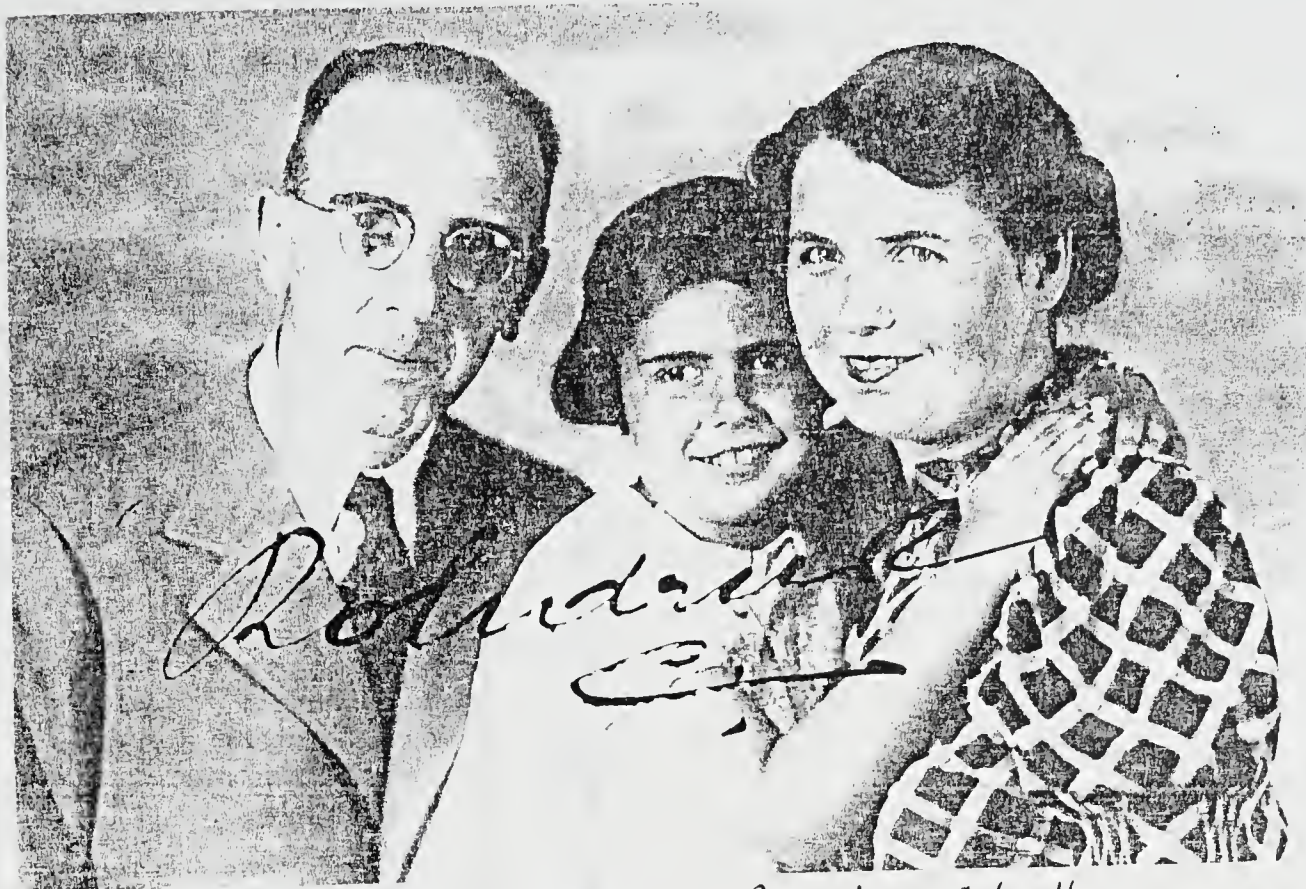
PRAQUE XII, RUBEŠOVA 17

P. T.

Bitte, beachten Sie folgendes genau:

1. Die Transportnummer Ihres Kindes POLGIR Renate ist 676
2. Das Gepäck muss am zwischen bei Firma Mellion am Masarykbhf. Gepäckhalle Ankunftseite aufgegeben, bzw. hingeschickt werden. Vom Coms mitte wird gegen Mittellosigkeitsbeweis 25 kg Gepäck bezahlt.
3. Bei Firma Mellion empfangen Sie bei der Gepäckaufgabe 2 Kofferzettel mit Name und Transportnummer des Kindes.
4. Es dürfen nur zwei Koffer für jedes Kind aufgegeben werden, und jeder Koffer muss mit einem Kofferzettel des Committeees versehen sein.
5. Das Gepäck darf nur Kinderkleidung enthalten. Sollte die Zollbehörde Grund zur Beanspruchung eines Gepäckstückes haben, so würde das Kind, auf dessen Nummer der Kofferzettel lautet, vom Transport ausgeschlossen und aus dem Register des Committeees gestrichen werden.
6. Das Kind darf auf die Reise nur einen Rucksack mitnehmen, der nur Essen und Trinken, Waschzeug und eventuell eine kleine Decke enthalten darf.
Der Rucksack darf bei Kindern unter 10 Jahren nicht schwerer sein als 6 kg und bei Kindern über 10 Jahren nicht schwerer als 10 kg. Halten Sie sich an diese Vorschrift, sonst müssten Sie am Bahnsteig auspacken!
7. Der beigeschlossene Kofferzettel muss sorgfältig um den Hals des Kindes gebunden werden, bevor es am Tage der Abreise zum Bahnhof kommt.
8. Es sind für jedes Kind nur zehn Mark in Münzen zum Mitnehmen gestattet.
9. Die Fahrkarte nach London kostet K 590.—, bei Kindern unter zehn Jahren K 295.—. Das deutsche Durchreisevisum kostet für jedes Kind K 24.—. Bitte, senden Sie uns daher diesen Betrag mittels Postanweisung an unser Prager Büro sobald als möglich. Also bei Kindern über zehn Jahren insgesamt K 614.— und bei Kindern unter zehn Jahren K 319.—. Falls Eltern angeben, diese Kosten nicht bezahlen zu können, so müssen Sie es durch Vorlage eines Armutszeugnisses oder anderer Belege beweisen.
10. Bei der Abreise müssen die Kinder in die reservierten Abteile gehen und sich auf die mit ihrer Transportnummer bezeichneten Plätze setzen. Begleitpersonen dürfen den Wagen nicht betreten, ausser bei Kindern unter acht Jahren. Sobald die Transportliste mit den in den einzelnen Abteilen befindlichen Kindern kontrolliert ist, dürfen die Kinder wieder auf den Bahnsteig hinaus. Es ist daher unerlässlich, dass die Kinder während der Kontrolle unbedingt auf ihren Plätzen bleiben.
11. Der Zug fährt vom Wilson Bahnhof am Montag 31. VII um 23 Uhr 42 Minuten. Alle Kinder müssen 90 Minuten vorher auf dem Bahnhof sein.
12. Zur Zeit ist es nicht notwendig, dass die Kinder einen Pass haben, aber falls ein Kind bereits einen Pass hat, so darf es ihn mitnehmen.
13. Sämtliche für die Reise notwendigen Dokumente und Belege werden durch uns besorgt.
14. Angebote, armen Kindern die Reise etc. zu bezahlen, werden unter gar keinen Umständen angenommen.
15. Kinder, die ohne triftigen Grund ausspringen werden für immer aus der Transportliste gestrichen.
16. Bitte beachten Sie alle hier angegebenen Anleitungen auf das Genaueste!

8. INSTRUCTIONS TO PARENTS FROM BRITISH COMMITTEE



Q. A. Miki, Renate, Nelly



Q. B Nelly and Renate



Q. C. Photograph
published in Quaker
newsletter



Milý tatíčku!

Ty jsi mě psal, že když se dopis
dostane, že už budu ve Elisbanu
ale zatím mě ho dala aunt Edna na
nádraží. Hlavně je moc romantický
a tomu obciánku není vůbec podobný.
Cesta byla moc pěkná a na lodi jsme

10. First letter from England

spaly jako dudci (v halinách.) Ute

alaku jsem trošku spala. V noci mě

nebyla nima. Ani na Kanalu mě nebylo

nima protože jsem spala v pivárně pěkně

v postýlce. Uvečera jsem nespala. Na lo-

di jsme snídali také špatně my jsme

nešli čaj a mlékem. Leno cukru.

Kavýčkovi jsem ~~pro~~ pejska dala a

ještě jsem dostala od Štěpána ~~š~~ škorou

ku na shládnutí a tak jsem měla taky

dala. Pejška nemají ale na to mají ko-

vičku. Co dělá Genda? To překvapení bylo
moc hezké děkuji.

Milá maminka!

Děkuji za ty peníze. Když mě pošleš

klaněnou? Máš už pramatníka od Maně?

Pratníka jsem spala v pěkně ~~š~~ škorou

průběhu. Uvečera jsem nespala. Na lo-

di jsme snídali také špatně my jsme

nešli čaj a mlékem. Leno cukru.

Kavýčkovi jsem ~~pro~~ pejska dala a

ještě jsem dostala od Štěpána ~~š~~ škorou

ku na shládnutí a tak jsem měla taky

dala. Pejška nemají ale na to mají ko-

vičku. Co dělá Genda? To překvapení bylo
moc hezké děkuji.

back of 10.



Dear Mamma
and Daddy,

Now I have got Harry and
Harry has got the big duck. I
go every afternoon for a big
walk, and I find thistles, and
chestnuts, and conkers, and many

11. Letter from
England

kinds of things. I have made up walk, we sometimes meet a
wind-mill, and a dolly out of man who has got a house
wool at school. Last night the big called Bobby, and this man
children were acting Little Red is called Mr. Lee and he gives
Kodak. It was very nice. ~~Miss~~ us always sweets.

Miss Jenkins was the wolf and
she was dressed very funny.

Uncle Harry is there this week
and and Harry, and I took
him for a walk! When all
the children and I go for a

Lots of Love
and

many
Kisses
Bobby.

11. back of letter

Best regards Charles and Anne



Dear Daddy and

Mummy

I understand ~~understand~~ Miss Jeffs all. It is easy to go there to school. It is not a bit difficult for me, I did not get a telegram from you. Now I live with a lady called Mrs.

Boffey and Mr. Boffey. They have got

12. Letter from England

two big girls called Margaret and Reenya.
 Reenya is 15 years old and Margaret is 16 years
 old. They have got a big garden where
 we are playing. They have got an other
 big girl called Marien and she is 20 years
 old. In this place are very many children
 with whom I and Harey can play.

We are going on nice walks in woods
 and in the grass and pick black berries.

I am very sorry that Gerda is ill.

I am drinking milk at school but not now.

I have got the letter from Hugo.

10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, 1000, and 1000000000

Missis from Pipah

My wife, Reenya & Marien
 are staying in the country.
 I am very sorry
 that Gerda is ill.
 I am drinking milk at school but not now.

R. Polgar 115 Seward Ave. Flin

9/11-39

12. back of letter



HAGBARD JONASSEN, Denmark.

HAGBARD JONASSEN led the movement throughout the war and occupation of Denmark. *Aldrig mere Krig* (No More War), the movement's paper, was published every month, volunteers for relief work were trained and equipped and over sixty are now working in the far north of Norway. Yet such was the tension in Denmark towards the end of the war that "one never knew, when going out in the morning, whether one would return at night".

Nordre Paradisvej 14, Holte.

Mr. & Mrs. Polgar,
4a, Quergasse, Brunn.

Dear Friends.

For some days ago I saw Grace. The whole family are all well and are sending you best wishes for the new year, Grace are sending her special love.

Yesterday Renate wrote a letter to you, I hope you have got it. We are all living well here. The only thing we wish is that we soon will be able to meet again.

With best wishes

Yours very sincerely

H. Jonassen

13. Letter from Hagbard Jonassen

Slovenský Červený kríž
Bratislava, Dobrovičova 11/II

3726
Croix-Rouge Slovaque
Slowakisches Rotes Kreuz
Bratislava, Dobrovičova 11/II

COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL DE LA CROIX-ROUGE

Palais du Conseil Général
GENÈVE (Suisse)

Demandeur — O zprávu žiada — Antragsteller

Nom - Meno - Name **POLGAR**
Prénom - Priezvisko - Vorname **NIKOLAUS**
Rue - Ulica - Strasse **HLINKA-PLATZ 28**
Localité - Miesto - Ortschaft **KEŽMAROK**
Province - Pošta - Provinz
Pays - Oblasť (krajina) - Land **SLOVAKIE**

Message à transmettre - O sebe oznamuje - Mitteilung

(25 mots au maximum, nouvelles de caractère strictement personnel et familial) — (Nicht über 25 Worte, nur persönliche Familiennachrichten)

UNSERE LIEBEN! ÜBERSIEDELTEN ZU OMI
SIND GESUND HOFFEN DASSELBE VON EUCH.
KÜSSEN REINATER, EDNA, BEIDE HARRYS
UND GRACE. ER BITTEN EHESTE NACH-
RICHT. EURE MIKI NELLY

Date - Dátum - Datum **15. I. 1942**

Destinataire — Komu zprávu doručit — Empfänger

Nom - Meno - Name **DANIELS FÜR POLGAR**
Prénom - Priezvisko - Vorname **HARRY FÜR KENATE**
Lieu et date de naissance -
Miesto a dátum narodenia - Geburtsort u. Datum **15. VII. 1931 - BRÜNN**
Fils de - Syn otca - Sohn des **TOCHTER NIKOLAUS** et de - a matky - u. der **NELLY POLGAR**
Dernière adresse connue - Posledná adresa - Letztbekannte Adresse
Rue - Ulica - Strasse **NEWDEN AVENUE 115**
Localité - Miesto a pošta - Ortschaft **FLIXTON**
Province - Okres - Provinz **CHESHIRE**
Pays - Krajina - Land **ENGLAND**

RÉPONSE AU VERSO.
Ecrire très lisiblement!

ODPOVEDAJE NA DRUHEJ STRANE.
Píšte čitateľne!

ANTWORT UMSEITIG.
Bitte deutlich schreiben!

14. Copy of 25 word Red Cross lettergram

RÉPONSE — ODPOVĚD — ANTWORT

Message à renvoyer au demandeur

Zpráva pro žadatele — Mitteilung an den Antragsteller zurückzusenden

(25 mots au maximum nouvelles de caractère strictement personnel et familial) — (Písať len do 25 slov, zprávy osobné a rodinné) — (Nicht über 25 Worte, nur persönliche Familiennachrichten)

DEAR FRIENDS,

RENATE EXTREMELY WELL AND
HAPPY, MAKING EXCELLENT PROGRESS
AT GRAMMAR SCHOOL. GROWING
FAST, SENDS BEST LOVE AND HOPES
YOU ARE BOTH WELL.

HARRY

Date - Dátum - Datum

23-3-42



30 IV 1942



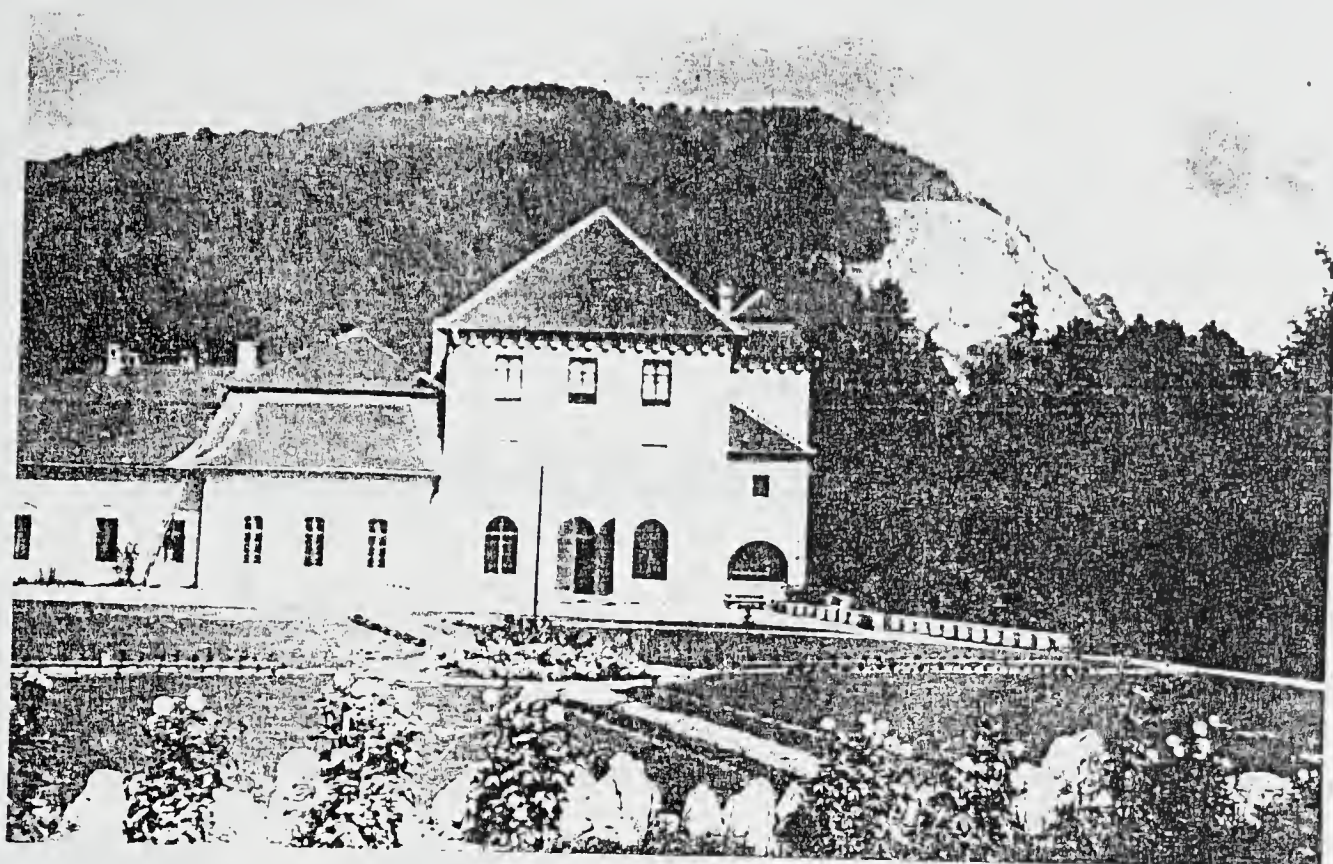
Prière d'écrire très lisiblement.

Prosíme písať čitateľne.

Bitte sehr deutlich schreiben.

14. Back of lettergram

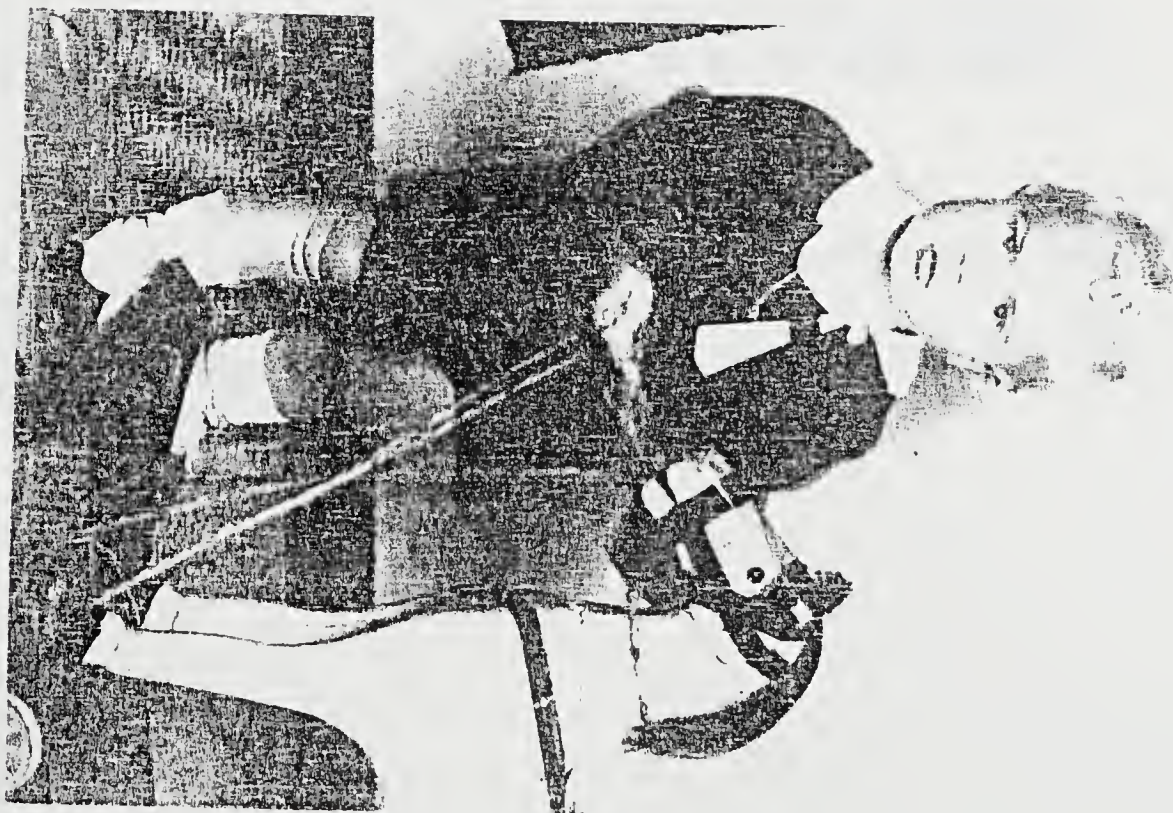
15. Castle in
Jaklovce (H)



15 B Schwester
Susanna
and Baby Peter



15.c. Little Peter
as a toddler



Okresný úrad v Gelnici.

Bezirksamt in Göllnitz.

Číslo evid: ... 63 ...

Evidenznummer: ... 63 ...

Povolenie k cestovaniu - Reisebewilligung.Povoľujem Pánu Panej *Susanna Schlesingerovi* 13.5.1944
Ich bewillige Herrn-Frauobyvateľovi obce *Jakobce* zamestnaním *kytárnik*
wohnhaft in der Gemeinde Beschäftigung *Erzieherin*Jednu cestu ~~viacnásobne~~ do *Krompachy*
jednu Reise-mehrmalige Reise aus *Jakobce* .. nach *Bratislava* ..s platnosťou do
und zurück aus folgenden Grund: *Kur Heilung* ..s platnosťou do
mit Gültigkeit bis *30. November 1944* ..Číslo
ZahlM platnosti tohoto povolenia sa vyžaduje vido-
vanie najbližšieho nemeckého vojenského veliteľstva.Zur Gültigkeit dieser Bewilligung ist die
Vidimierung des nächsten Deutschen Ortskomandos erforderlich.Gelnica dňa *26. Oktobra 1944* ..

Na stráž!

*[Signature]*
okresný náčelník.
Bezirkshauptmann,Tr. Ortskommandantur
Krompachy. 1.11.1944

Obltn. u. Ortskommandant

*16. Susanna Schlesinger's
permission to travel*

Číslo 15-1943 0 L.

SLOVENSKÁ REPUBLIKA

Všeobecná občianska legitimácia štátneho občana Slovenskej republiky

Meno: MIKULÁŠA

Priezvisko: P O T O Č N Ý

Potvrďuje sa, táto fotografia zobrazuje majiteľa legitimácie Mikuláša Potočného

Istebníka n./v.

ktorý sa na nej pred úradom vlastnoručne podpísal.

17. Mikulaš Potočný - identity card

R o d n ý l i s t .

G e b u r t s s c e i n .

Župa, Komitat: T r e n č i a n s k á .

Okres, Bezirk: T r e n č i n .

Bežné číslo: 10

Doba zápisu /deň, mesiac, rok/ 15. marca 1896

Doba narodenia /deň, mesiac, rok/ 11. /jedenásteho/ marca, 1896, /jedentisícosemsto-
deväťdesiatšesť/

Meno dieťaťa, pohlavie, náboženstvo: M i k u l á š , chlapec, r.kat.

Meno a priezvisko, zamestnanie /postavenie/ a bydlisko rodičov: Peter Potočný,
krajčír, náboženstvo: r.kat., vek. 35,Anna Krátka, domáca, Ištebník n/Váh.,
náboženstvo: r.kat., vek: 30

Miesto narodenia, keď matka neporodila v svojom bydlisku: -----

Pripadné poznámky pred podpisom - podpisy: Peter Potočný v.r. oznamovateľ,

Andrej Kiss v.r. oznamovateľ!.....

Dodatočné zápisy, opravy: -----

Svedčím, že sa tento výťah doslovne, obsažne srovnáva s matkou narodených v
Ištebnického n./V. matričného obvodu.

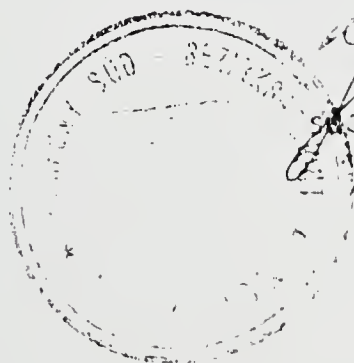
V Ištebníku nad Váhom, 21.VI.1943. Razitko: Matričný obvod Ištebník.

nečitateľný podpis v.r. matrikár.

Matričný poplatok 3 /tri/ Ks pod čís. 42/1943 zaplatený. Pôvodné znenie zápisu podľa
sa v smysle min.nar.poslovenčené.

Tento stranou samou vyhotovený výťah doslovne s pôvodným vystavenou na 11. marca 1896, ktorá je opatrená
korom za 8 - 1/2

Zo sudnej kancelarie okresného súdu v Kežmarku,
oddelenie I., dňa 3. Apríla 1944



Číslo za úradný výťah 10 - Ks
za úradný výťah 987/44 ev. z.

18. Mikuláš Potočný
birth certificate



19. Melly and Miki after the war

COMPANY HELPS BOY TO HAVE HOLIDAY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

THIRTEEN years old Harry Daniels, of King Edward-drive, Grays, leaves on Saturday of next week by Airlinks plane for Brno, Czechoslovakia, to spend several weeks with the family of Renata Polgarava, sixteen years old Czech girl, who for seven years was a guest at his home.

When making the arrangements for the visit Harry's father got in touch with British Bata to help him get the necessary facilities and also that the boy might have somebody to look after him on the way. At East Tilbury it was found possible to assist Mr. Daniels and Mr. A. F. Salmon, of the welfare department, made the necessary arrangements for obtaining passport and visas and also arranged his air passage.



The other passengers will all be Bata people and will include Mr. V. Hassala and Mr. Jerry Sedivy who will see that the boy is well looked after on the air trip to Prague. Here Mr. Salmon is

arranging for the boy to be accompanied on the train journey to Brno.

Seen by a *Bata Record* representative as soon as the forthcoming trip was mentioned, Harry's eyes sparkled with excitement. He said he is looking forward to the trip very much, and to staying with the Polgarava family in a country he heard so much about from Renata.

GREAT PALS

It would be his first time on the Continent and his first trip on a plane, so his excitement is understandable. He and Renata were great pals and, during the time she spent at the Daniels home, the pretty Czech girl came to be regarded as one of the family.

Mrs. Daniels told *Bata Record*, "We were so glad when the war ended and Renata's parents were found to have come out all right, though her father had been in a concentration camp for several years. But I must confess it was a wrench parting with her and we missed her especially last Christmas."

Renata first came to the Daniels home a month before war was declared. She was a dark haired lustrous eyed child, as good as gold, and was immediately taken to everybody's heart.

Her mother, Mrs. Nelly Polgarava, flew to England when the war was over and spent a time on holiday as the guest of the Daniels. Renata remained six months longer to take her school certificate examination and rewarded distinctions, a credit and a pass, a really excellent result, and then she flew back to Czechoslovakia alone.

The Daniels have only recently come to the south of England. They lived in Manchester at the time the war started later moving to Morcambe where Mr. Daniels was working for Shell Mex.

20. Copy of newspaper clipping, 1947, prior to Harry's visit to Czechoslovakia.



21. Tibor in his office
at the Veterinary School
in Brno, 1967



22. Rabbi Richard Feder in Brno
1875 - 1970

USHMM LIBRARY



01 0001 0128 7752